

## Another Response to David, Part 7: The Anatomy of Legend and the Ruse of Revelation

I continue now with my final installment in my response to [David's lengthy 16 Aug. comment](#) to my blog [In Response to David on I Corinthians 15:3-8](#).

David wrote:

Are all these ancient historians spewing legend material uncritically?

I certainly would not advocate accepting the New Testament's stories at face value, nor would I rush to the judgment that their authors were "historians" per se. We need to ask: what informed and guided their worldview, their religious presuppositions or academic criteria for historical accuracy? I see plenty of evidence for the former and basically zero evidence for the latter. Apologists often point to the author of Luke-Acts to secure the claim that the New Testament's stories have the high caliber credentials of a superb historian. But scholars are far from unanimous on the value of Luke-Acts as actual history.

Verdicts on Acts have ranged from dismissing it as a bundle of legends to accepting it as a history whose trustworthiness is unsurpassed. Today conservative commentators still suppose, as does Dunn ([*The Acts of the Apostles*], pp. xi, 335), that it may well have been written by a companion of Paul. But a few theologians - John Bowden, for instance - are prepared to set it aside as "ideology, party history" ([Appendix to his English translation of G. Ludemann, *The Unholy in Holy Scripture*], p. 151. Others say that because it shows accurate knowledge of Roman administration it must be accepted as a well-informed account by a meticulous historian. But there is no reason why Luke should not have known a great deal about the Roman Empire, whatever is true of his story. In this connection, Barrett, who by no means wishes to suggest that Luke created his story out of nothing, observes that he himself has read "many detective stories in which legal and police procedures were described with careful accuracy, but in the service of a completely fictitious plot" ("The Historicity of Acts," *Journal of Theological Studies*], p. 525). (Wells, *Can We Trust the New Testament?*, pp. 111-112)

I find myself in agreement with Wells when he points out that "the profusion of miracles throughout Acts is something that does not inspire confidence" that we are reading genuine history (Ibid., p. 97). He gives as examples:

the Spirit providing transport for missionaries (8:39), angels ordering them about (8:26) and releasing on one occasion the apostles (5:19) and on another Peter (12:7-10) from the securest of prisons. Such stories of prisoners being supernaturally released were popular in the literature of the time. The apostles themselves work miracles ceaselessly. The Jews have their own magicians but they are always worsted when up against Peter or Paul (8:9-24; 13:6-11). Already by Chapter 2 the apostles have performed "many signs and wonders" (2:43); and in Chapter 5 "the multitude from the cities round Jerusalem" - there were no 'cities' round it: Luke had a poor grasp of Palestinian geography - bring sick folk, "and they were healed every one" (5:16). They thought they might be cured if only Peter's shadow fell upon them (5:15), just as, later, contact with Paul's handkerchief in fact suffices to make sufferers well (19:12). When Peter raises Tabitha from the dead (9:36-41), the obvious parallel with what both Elijah and Elisha had done (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:18-37) betrays that Luke's intention here was to show that the apostles were in no way inferior to the prophets. But the more general overall purpose of the miracle stories is to demonstrate that the growth of the early church was God-driven. (Ibid.)

So if the author of Luke-Acts was a historian, I suppose Agatha Christie was also. At any rate, I've seen no good reason from Christians to suppose that the NT authors were not indulging themselves in the development of legends, and with the content and a track record like those which we see in the gospels and the book of Acts, it's pretty easy to see why.

David wrote:

External sources seem to be the biggest problem for the legend theory.

Actually, as Wells, Doherty, Freke & Gandy, Price, etc., all show, external sources confirm the theory quite

elegantly. They just don't constrain their understanding of those sources according to a supernatural bias. Also, see my [Early Non-Christian Testimony](#).

David wrote:

Do you really intend to reject every piece of evidence simply because it came later and "could have" been embellished?

If the context suggests that a feature or element is the result of embellishment, then I see no reason why I should not identify it as such. For instance, in Matthew, at Jesus' death on the cross, you have an earthquake, saints rising out of their graves, the rent in the temple cloth, etc., details which no other writer, either in the NT or in the non-Christian record of the time, corroborates. All these things strike me as embellishments intended to make the event all the more impressive and dramatic. I see every reason to suppose these are inventions by the author and no reason to suppose they are historical.

There are many examples, too numerous to cull together here, which give little reason for confidence that we're reading history in the gospels. For instance, in discussing two passages in Mark - 7:31-36 and 8:22-26 - Wells points out:

In both these pericopes Jesus uses spittle in the process of effecting the cure. All races of antiquity attached magical healing significance to spittle (see the discussion in Hull 1974, pp. 76-78), and this crudity, well-known from pagan parallels and embarrassing to commentators, may explain why Matthew and Luke omitted these two Markan stories. (*The Jesus Myth*, p. 149)

Are these healing stories really "history"? Why should we accept them as genuine history? It's no use to try to recreate these conditions using saliva from anyone today, because apologists will say that mere mortal spit does not have the magical properties of an incarnated deity's spit. So we're stuck with accepting Mark on his say so in a matter which is simply incredible and obviously fantastic.

In many parts of the gospels, Jesus instructs story characters who are made to witness his acts or identify him as the messiah, to tell no one. Did they all quite coincidentally violate his instruction and go and tell someone who was writing Jesus' biography about this? In Jesus' hesitation prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, we read the prayer Jesus supposedly uttered in private. Who was there to record this if Jesus was praying in private? Who was there to witness Jesus' temptation in the wilderness? The stories are chock full of constructed sequences which are obviously not historical.

David wrote:

The cumulative case is rather devastating; indeed, not even Christian apologists explaining away apparent Bible contradictions have attempted the maneuvers of proponents of the extreme legend theory.

Christian apologists ultimately rest their appeal to supernaturalism; they have to, because that is what the biblical record does. Paul appeals to supernatural revelation. The gospels appeal to miracles. The later apologists appeal to supernatural agencies. Those who see the telltale signs of legend-building need not make appeal to such fantasies.

David wrote:

Douglas J. Moo (The Letter of James, pg 13) points out that '...physical ties to Jesus became important only after the time of James' death.'

I replied:

David, this statement right here undermines the view that "brother of the Lord" indicates a sibling relationship.

David responded:

Absolutely not, because I clearly said that I reject the position that Paul is honoring James with the phrase.

You can reject the view that Paul is honoring James with a title all you like. This only makes Moo's point all the

more problematic though, since your position is that "brother of the Lord" is a reference indicating a sibling relationship. You want to interpret Paul as referring to James as a sibling of Jesus while he was yet alive (and writing when he was yet alive, according to Christian tradition), and yet here's Moo proclaiming that "physical ties to Jesus became important only after the time of James' death."

David wrote:

Why is any scholar that disagrees with your position a 'Christian apologist'?

I don't believe I have affirmed or practiced such a rule.

I wrote:

Actually we can say more than this. There are clear signs of tampering of common sources throughout the synoptics to tailor them to the specific preferences of the writer. It's clear that Matthew and Luke were drawing upon Mark's model, for they follow the same general course. But between Matthew and Luke, who (as many scholars - you like those - have pointed out) were both also drawing on a non-Markan source (referred to in the literature as Q), show differences in rendering the same sayings attributed to Jesus.

David responded:

I think a lot of the alleged 'tampering' is simply each author demonstrating a purpose and an intended audience.

I suppose that's one way of looking at it. However, a study of the four gospels' respective treatment of the passion sequences and their aftermath would reveal something other than merely differing purposes or different intended audiences. Rather, we would see that the basic story found in Mark (the earliest gospel) undergoes various transformations as it is developed, reworked and, yes, embellished. One consequence of all this is the jumble of contradictions which apologists have for centuries tried either to cover up or to explain away, both tasks being rather hopeless. For starters, take a look at Dan Barker's [Leave No Stone Unturned](#). The evangelists' willingness to revise the story to suit their own individual purposes, indicates that what we're looking at here is not history, but theologically laden legends.

I had cited two passages, one from Matthew and the other from Luke, which demonstrated how one or the other or both authors adapted a saying which both attribute to Jesus in different ways:

Mt. 7:11: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

Lk. 11:13: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

I then commented:

Notice how Luke pushes the promise further into the imaginative realm of the supernatural. Where on Matthew's version, the reader believing the promise could reasonably expect tangible goodies in response to asking the "Father" for them, Luke preempts such expectation by altering the text to say "the Holy Spirit" instead of simply "good things," which is, even on the Christian view, a broader generality. There are many similar examples of such loose handling of source material in the gospels. Clearly these folks were \*creating\* narratives, not \*recording\* history.

David responded:

Some manuscripts for Luke 11:13 read ?????? ??????, or 'the good spirit'.

Yes, I've heard this before. But this does not alter my point. Luke still moves what Matthew has away from a material interpretation. Matthew's "good things" is far more open-ended. The author of Luke, very likely drawing from the same or closely similar source, probably saw this as imprudent (since promises about material goods can be tested, and are therefore an opportunity for failure), and recast it in a manner which precludes a material interpretation, thus denying a chance for failure. And we're still left wondering: Which, if either statement, did Jesus really say?

David continued:

There is the issue of the authors placement of this narrative within the theme he is developing for his audience: 'The Lukan parallel in 11:9-13 comes in a context where prayer is the issue. The point is fundamentally the same, but Luke narrows the focus. Rather than speaking of good gifts, he notes that the Holy Spirit is given. Since the Spirit is the consummate gift of God and also is a source of enablement and wisdom, the different is not that great.' (Darrell Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture*, pg 146 sect. 63)

This reads like a bald-faced attempt at spin. No matter how apologists try to explain it, there is still a difference here, and it is in fact a significant difference. That "Luke narrows the focus" only concedes that the author is reworking the material, and thus not recording history but is inserting his own theological interpretation at this point. Since "good things" is much broader and more inclusive than "the Holy Spirit," which is exactly specific, there's a great difference between the two. If one knew only the Matthean passage, he could certainly be forgiven for taking it to be a promise for material values (e.g., new sandals, medicine, wine, a bigger house, clothing for the children, winning the lottery, etc.). But Luke would rebuke such an interpretation, saying "No, no, no... Those kinds of things aren't what's being promised here. Something much different, residing in the spiritual realm, is what Jesus is offering you. Sure, you can ask for new garments, better food, disease cures, a restored spine, wealth, etc., but you need to be satisfied with the Holy Spirit instead." Indeed, Luke's upgrade of the saying moves the reward of supplication into the realm of the [imaginary](#) (anyone can imagine that some supernatural spirit has moved into his soul), and you can't blame the guy: in such a realm, there are no failures.

David then wrote:

Also, this is arguably usage of a common figure of speech called synecdoche. (see Blomberg, *The Historic Reliability of the Gospels*, pg 165)

Perhaps I'm just dense (though I've studied a lot of poetry in my day), but I fail to see how anyone would take Matthew's "good things" as a synecdoche for "the Holy Spirit." In her standard *Poetry Handbook*, B. Deutsch defines 'synecdoche' as "the naming of a part to mean the whole" (p. 88). What we have in the case of Matthew, however, goes the opposite direction: rather than naming some part which belongs to the whole of "the Holy Spirit," Matthew supplies a vastly broader term, which (if one values it) could be argued to include "the Holy Spirit," but certainly much, much more than this. Similarly, it is hard to see how "the Holy Spirit" could plausibly serve as a synecdoche for "good things," because of reasons given. If it is, as the apologist wagers, an instance of synecdoche, then again we're left wondering what Jesus really said, for at least one author has revised an earlier source.

David wrote:

One need not conclude that the Gospel authors were inventing their entire stories simply because they tried to speak to their audiences.

That the authors "tried to speak to their audiences" is not the essential indicator of invention or reworking a text, so this statement misses the point. When it comes to sayings in the gospels taken from Q (which Mt. 7:11 and Lk. 11:13 appear to be), I don't think the gospel writers were so much inventing as they were adapting a source to inform their respective portraits of Jesus. However, this vies against the notion that the gospel writers were recounting eyewitness accounts or chronicling history. Did Jesus say "good things" (Mt. 7:11) or "the Holy Spirit" (Lk. 11:13)? Did Jesus say anything at all? Given the shoddy evidence and the contaminated documents, I'm prone to suppose not.

I wrote:

If a variety of religions which preceded Christianity incorporated worship practices that involved, for instance, the consumption of bread and wine as symbols for the flesh and blood of a resurrected deity.

David asked:

Has someone provided an example of this?

I responded:

Yes, see for instance Freke and Gandy, *The Jesus Mysteries*, Robert Price's many articles and several books on the matter, Wells, Doherty, and numerous other sources. I certainly don't have time to spoonfeed you here. But here's a little taste, from [Price's review of NT Wright's The Resurrection of the Son of God](#) (which I have, but have not fully read):

There are three fundamental, vitiating errors running like fault lines through the unstable continent of this book. The first is a complete unwillingness to engage a number of specific questions or bodies of evidence that threaten to shatter Wright's over-optimistically orthodox assessment of the evidence. The most striking of these blustering evasions has to do with the dying-and-rising redeemer cults that permeated the environment of early Christianity and had for many, many centuries. Ezekiel 8:14 bemoans the ancient Jerusalemite women's lamentation for Tammuz, derived from the Dumuzi cult of ancient Mesopotamia. Ugaritic texts make it plain that Baal's death and resurrection and subsequent enthronement at the side of his Father El went back centuries before Christianity and were widespread in Israel. Pyramid texts tell us that Osiris' devotees expected to share in his resurrection. Marduk, too, rose from the dead. And then there is the Phrygian Attis, the Syrian Adonis. The harmonistic efforts of Bruce Metzger, Edwin Yamauchi, Ron Sider, Jonathan Z. Smith and others have been completely futile, utterly failing either to deconstruct the dying-and-rising god mytheme (as Smith vainly tries to do) or to claim that the Mysteries borrowed their resurrected savior myths and rituals from Christianity. If that were so, why on earth did early apologists admit that the pagan versions were earlier, invented as counterfeits before the fact by Satan? Such myths and rites were well known to Jews and Galileans, not to mention Ephesians, Corinthians, etc., for many centuries. But all this Wright merely brushes off, as if it has long been discredited. He merely refers us to other books. It is all part of his bluff: "Oh, no one takes that seriously anymore! Really, it's so *pass?!'*"

David retorted:

The quote you provided does not address my question.

The quote in fact does provide a brief summary in response to your question, and the other sources which I gave in response to your question go further in depth on the matter. As I said, I am not going to spoonfeed you here.

David continued:

Honestly I can stand Doherty but Price (in his debates) uses so much rhetorical bluster that I rarely want to sit and read him.

Price is a delight to read. He turns what can easily become dry reading into something both informative as well as entertaining. Also, his polemic style is fairly mild compared to (and much more mature than) some of the caustic vitriol I've seen many internet apologists produce.

I wrote:

Okay, so long as it's understood that borrowing from pre-Christian religious models was taking place in the molding of the Christian product. There were many sources, including various Jewish sectarian sources, the Wisdom literature, mystery religions, etc.

David insisted:

If you wish to assert borrowing from the mystery religions, go for it but give me an argument, not just assertions from Price.

I don't see any need to provide my own arguments for this. Price's work on this topic is sufficient in my view. I see no reason to reinvent the wheel here.

I wrote:

The evidence is clearly the opposite as you have it, but by deeming the mystery cults as "irrelevant to [your] analysis" as you have, you cut yourself off from a vast area of knowledge and source of evidence. I suspect there's an apologetic reason why you have chosen to do this.

David responded:

The evidence has yet to be presented.

Notice the bald assertion from ignorance here. Or, if it's not ignorance, it's simply blatant denial, this after just noting Price's work on the issue.

David continued:

I see no reason to accept mystery cult allegations on the grounds that we have no historical evidence of it.

There's no historical evidence of the Osiris cult, the Dionysos cult, Mithraism, the Eleusinian mysteries, etc.? Here you put yourself in the dubious position of having to prove a negative. Do you think scholars invented these cults in modern times in order to view Christianity as "the great surviving mystery religion" (Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle*, p. 115)?

David continued:

There is plenty of explanatory power within Judaism for Christian practices, why need I go seek explanations in places where evidence doesn't exist?

I agree that there is "plenty of explanatory power within Judaism for Christian practices," but this is incomplete. Paul drew from the OT (instead of from alleged knowledge of a historical Jesus), but also from the Wisdom literature as well (some of which is apocryphal). But there's no question that Hellenistic culture also had its share of influence on Paul as well.

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.

David responded:

As I recall you asked two questions: 1. How does Paul know he has received information from a supernatural source? 2. How do we know that Paul has received information from a supernatural source?

Yes, these are the kinds of questions I was hoping to pursue with you. Paul himself does not seem to address any of them. Going by the content of the bible, we're supposed to just take his word for this. But most people wouldn't do this in the case of anyone else. Why does Paul enjoy this privilege with believers?

David continued:

Doug Geivett delivered an excellent paper at the same Greer-Heard conference that I referenced earlier (Dom Crossan vs NT Wright) on the "Epistemology of Resurrection Belief." He also has a blog and is very responsive and polite, so I won't hesitate to refer you to him for a thoroughly more educated opinion. His blog [here](#).

Does Geivett get to speak for Paul? If so, why? What special knowledge of Paul's mental situation does Geivett have that is not available to the rest of us? How would Geivett know how Paul knew that he received a revelation from a supernatural source? I haven't read Geivett's paper so I don't know if he addresses my questions or not. And nothing you provide here suggests that he does, other than that you recommend it in response to my questions. Is his paper available online, or if not can you recap any of his relevant points? I'm just curious, when someone like the apostle Paul claims to have received knowledge by revelation, how this works, and why we should take Paul's word for it. For apparently that's all we have to go on - Paul's say so. In his writings, Paul certainly does not provide any objective evidence to have acquired knowledge supernaturally. Nor does he explain how knowledge can be acquired by revelation, how one knows that what he is experiencing is revelation (if revelation is something experienced in the first place), or how one distinguishes between what he calls knowledge by revelation and what he may merely be imagining. None of this is addressed in the bible from what I can tell; indeed, it seems that the authors who have contributed to both testaments seem oblivious to these concerns from the very get go. If you believe I am wrong, then I invite you to show me where any biblical author addresses these questions and provides inputs which relevantly settle them.



Now again, I have not read Geivett's essay, but his own description of what occupies him in it does not give me much confidence that he in fact takes on the kinds of questions I have posed. In [a response to a critic](#) of his essay, Geivett recaps its purpose as follows:

I argue in my essay that N. T. Wright, a Christian theist, aims for methodological neutrality in his historical analysis of the evidence for and against a literal bodily resurrection of Jesus in the first century; in contrast, Dom Crossan's methodology is inherently naturalistic.

If this is an indication of what Geivett seeks to establish in his essay "The Epistemology of Resurrection Belief," I can only wonder what it has to do with explaining how Paul could know that he had received information from a supernatural source or how we can know that Paul actually received knowledge from a supernatural source.

David wrote:

1. As you've already pointed out, you will likely believe a personal experience or account if it comports with your expectations for that situation. I think you may have gone further and said you only believe reports that comport with the laws of nature, but a minor difference given the frequency of miracles.

What I accept as truthful is more involved than what you describe here. Briefly I will say that a claim, at minimum, needs to adhere to or at least be compatible with the primacy of existence principle; there must be some objective input from reality to inform it; it cannot contradict previously validated knowledge, etc. Certainly I would not accept as truth any statement which contradicts, either directly or indirectly, the primacy of existence principle. Conformity with the primacy of existence principle is a minimum requirement for accepting any ideational content as true. If a claim fails on this point, I know that it cannot be true.

David wrote:

2. If someone has an experience, and finds no reason to believe things aren't as they perceived, then they have good grounds for believing their experience to be authentic.

This is rather vague. At any rate, in any instance of experience, there is perception of an object(s), which is non-volitional, and there is - if one pursues what he has perceived - also the identification of the object(s) he has perceived. This latter activity is volitional in that we can choose to identify what we have perceived or ignore it, and if we choose to identify what we have perceived, the process by which we do this involves selective focus (the proper method is called integration by essentials). This is not an infallible process; we can and sometimes do make mistakes. When someone tells me that he has had an experience in which he has encountered a supernatural being, I tend to wonder what perceptual inputs (if any) were involved and what process he used to identify what he experienced as being supernatural. I also wonder what epistemological safeguards he may have in place (again, if any) which secure his claims from contamination by imagination, particularly because - after studying the issue myself for nearly 20 years - I find it pretty much impossible to distinguish supernaturalism from the playland of imagination. It is on questions such as this that theists tend to be most careful about covering their tracks, or outright evading.

In the case of Paul, who claims that the risen Christ appeared to him, he gives us nothing to go on in investigating these details. Did he see something? Going by what he says in I Cor. 15, it seems that he did see something, but he does not specify this. I've known Christians personally who claimed that Jesus appeared to them, and yet they did not claim to have seen anything that they called Jesus, but rather seemed to be imagining Jesus as an invisible, ethereal or immaterial being in their immediate vicinity. So whether or not Paul saw something or thought he saw something is not exactly clear. But let's suppose for argument's sake that he did see something. Well, what exactly did he see? He says it was the risen Christ. Well, how does one know what the risen Christ looks like? Is it possible that he saw something completely mundane but mistook it or misidentified it as something supernatural? Of course, Christians want to rule out such possibilities, but it's hard to see how one could reasonably do so. Christians apparently want Paul to be infallible where the rest of us are clearly fallible. So how did Paul identify what he saw as the risen Christ? He does not say; he gives no indication of how he made such an identification. We're expected simply to take his word for it. We are apparently obliged to grant Paul wide allowances on these matters which we would not consider giving to a man on trial for murder who claims that a werewolf appeared between him and the murder victim just long enough to do the gruesome deed and vanish in a puff of smoke. Why is Paul an eyewitness of the risen Christ, but the man on trial making such a plea is not likewise an eyewitness? After all, he was there, was he not? The evidence puts him there, that's why he's on trial. How could we prove his story is false? We wouldn't want to be presuppositionally biased against the existence of werewolves, would we?

So people claiming to have seen a resurrected human being, may very well have perceived something, but how they identify what they perceived as a resurrected human being is something that is not explained in the earliest testimony. The gospels were added into the record later in order to put credible eyewitnesses into the story, but these are clearly concocted stories, bearing the hallmark of fiction throughout, and not rationally credible whatsoever.

David wrote:

3. Reporting such an experience to others would follow similar criteria; namely, they would deem such testimony valid given they had no reason to believe the person was crazy, dishonest, or mistaken.

In the case of someone writing 2000 years ago, how can we gauge whether or not that individual was crazy, dishonest, or mistaken except by reference to what he has written? If the content of what he wrote contradicts basic fundamentals (such as the primacy of existence principle), why wouldn't we suppose that something about him was amiss in some way, be it that he was crazy, dishonest, mistaken, or simply constructing a story which was intended to have allegorical significance rather than historical value?

The policy which involves assessing a person's claims as automatically trustworthy if we have "no reason to believe the person was crazy, dishonest, or mistaken," strikes me as nothing more than a recipe for indiscriminate credulity. But if someone told me that he saw a resurrected man, why wouldn't I think he's at least mistaken, if not dishonest or deluded? Paul does not claim to have the kind of experience which the gospels give to some of Jesus' immediate followers. In fact, Paul gives no indication that he knows about the kind of experience that the gospels report in their post-resurrection appearance scenes. He gives no indication that Jesus had a following of disciples during his earthly life, or that his post-resurrection appearances to Peter and the other apostles were in the flesh and on the day of his resurrection, as the gospels depict it. The loose ends here are simply too reckless to take seriously as historical, and given their underlying commitment to the primacy of consciousness, such accounts cannot be true, for the primacy of consciousness defies the very concept of truth.

David wrote:

Conclusion: A person claiming to have experienced something miraculous is generally not going to convince me; especially if I haven't had personal experiences or reports from other, or most certainly not if I presuppose the impossibility of said events (which I do not). I do think in combination with other types of revelation (such as the Old Testament for those Paul was writing to, remember how much he liked to argue using it?) and with examination: experiences and testimonies lend support to warranted belief. At minimum such things may press a person to further explore something.

So a single claim by itself is not sufficient to convince you, but multiple claims to the same effect are? Apparently in your view, simply repeating claim (even if it's arbitrary?) will vouchsafe its credibility, is that right? It appears that your view of the world lacks a fundamental understanding pertaining to the proper orientation of the subject-object relationship. I have discussed this matter elsewhere on my blog, so I won't repeat myself here. But this deficiency on the part of your worldview is evident due to your willingness to take the notion of [the supernatural](#) seriously. Cultures around the world today, some of them untouched by the influence of Christianity, do in fact take superstitions and stories of supernatural beings and phenomena seriously, and, like Christians today and in the past, find ways of making these beliefs compatible with their everyday experience. The common denominator to the willingness to entertain supernaturalism is the acceptance, typically unbeknownst to the believer, of the primacy of consciousness view of reality. Without the primacy of existence principle as one's ultimate criterion in evaluating truth claims, a thinker, no matter how careful otherwise, is susceptible to falling prey to an irrational worldview. This is because, on the most fundamental issue in philosophy - namely the orientation of the subject-object relationship - an individual who grants validity to the primacy of consciousness, even implicitly, has conceded the foundation of his understanding of reality and of man to the hazards of subjectivism.

You allude to different "types of revelation," which sparks my curiosity. How many types of revelation are there, what distinguishes them, and how do they work? You then appear to be saying that a combination of different "types of revelation" with "examination" will lead to a warranted belief. I wonder why examination would be needed for someone who has received a revelation from a divine source. What could this add to the revelation? Isn't a revelation supposed to be accepted as a self-sufficient transmission of knowledge on its own merits qua revelation? If the content of a revelation could be verified by examination, why would it need to be revealed? And what would keep someone from calling a fantasy which has no objective correspondence to reality a



"revelation" from a divine source? For instance, what would keep me from claiming that it has been revealed to me by a divine source, that Mesus sits at the right hand of Yeah-Way in the supernatural Jingdom of Bleaven in triumph over Matan, the chief representative of uvil in the universe? For nay-sayers to disparage this truth as incoherent in some way, would only expose them for not having received the revelation. Indeed, I know of 762 other people who also received the same revelation. So with 763 witnesses to these truths, how could anyone dispute this?

When Paul says that the risen Jesus appeared to 500 brethren, and gives no details about time, place or circumstances, or even gives no specifics on what exactly these 500 people allegedly saw or experienced, how does one "further explore" this claim? It seems to come to an immediate dead end. Paul does not even name any of these people, so they're completely anonymous. What alternative does Paul give even his contemporary readers to having to simply take his word for it? What I find fascinating is that Paul apparently claimed to have had a personal visit by the risen Jesus, but he mentions it only once in all his letters, and then only in passing, giving no details to what actually may have transpired. For all that he gives us, he may have been sleeping when this happened. We only have his say so on the matter, and he does not describe his experience, which therefore means we have nothing to examine. He gives us no content to investigate or "further explore." But somehow you still conclude that Paul was telling the truth when he claims to have received knowledge via revelation. How do you determine this?

I wrote:

Also, I do have another question, which I've asked other Christians, but for which I have not received any satisfying responses. My question is this: Why doesn't Jesus just appear before all of us, as he allegedly did before Paul on the road to Damascus (according to Acts anyway), and settle all these conflicts which have raged for 2000 years? I asked a Christian this question once, and his response was "Jesus wants us to have faith" (which only confirms the disjunction between faith and reason). To which I asked another question in response: Are you then saying that Paul, the most prolific writer of the NT, did not have faith?

David responded:

If you're heading where I think you are, I don't want to get into the problem of evil this weekend, maybe another time. :)

No, that's not what I had in mind. I'm simply wondering, as I asked, why Jesus doesn't just appear to everyone in some profoundly compelling way, such as he is alleged to have done for Paul on the road to Damascus. This is not the problem of evil. It is what I call [The Problem of Saul](#). Jesus is supposed to be God in Christianity, and God according to Christianity is said not to be a respecter of persons. Moreover, before Jesus' appearance to him, Paul (then Saul) was supposed to be a vicious persecutor of the church, far more formidable than some internet blogger like me. So if Jesus is no respecter of persons, why doesn't he just appear before me and everyone else? It would settle things quite quickly, and it would probably go a long way in averting heresies, apostasy, rogue cultish spin-offs, etc.

Now, perhaps you are like [the late D. James Kennedy](#), who apparently did not believe in an omnipotent Jesus. Without explanation, Kennedy asserted in passing that "Christ cannot appear personally to all of the billions and billions of people that have lived on the earth since" the time of Paul." But if Jesus is supernatural, "controls whatsoever comes to pass" (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 160), and is not constrained by the laws of nature or the contingent facts of the universe, why suppose that he couldn't appear before everyone? He can know everyone's thoughts, can he not? And in his divine nature, he's omnipresent, is he not? What would prevent Jesus from appearing to anyone or everyone if he wanted to? D. James Kennedy?

In conclusion, we see that the objections and counterpoints which David has raised have already been anticipated in the critical literature, and are easily answered with a little digging. A fringe benefit to that digging is the discovery of more and more problems for the literalist Christian interpretation of the New Testament's stories. That what we have in the New Testament is a wellspring of legends and tall tales, is undeniable. Try as they may, Christian apologists, driven by their desire to protect a fantasy, will struggle in vain to validate their religious beliefs. Sadly, futility is their only reward.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian Legends](#)

## 97 Comments:

[Eliyahu](#) said...

Could someone please respond to the obvious. That there was a man named Yehoshua. He was the antithesis of the conjured, and when I say conjured I mean conjured, J-esus. Can't anyone figure out that the very fact that J-esus didn't exist is why Xtians can't in any critical analysis make the NT and other Xtian writings make logical sense. But if one wants to dig deep into the first century CE and look at extant writings and allow logic and science to be the final authority they will come up with a Torah observant Ribi, the Mashiach. Logic, sources, archeology, sorry no magic, no excuses. [www.netzarim.co.il](http://www.netzarim.co.il)

[September 21, 2008 9:18 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Well I've returned, and I see you've stayed busy while I was gone. Lets see if I can get caught up.

David wrote:

Are all these ancient historians spewing legend material uncritically?

Dawson: I certainly would not advocate accepting the New Testament's stories at face value

I was talking about the external sources in that statement.

Dawson: *Notice the bald assertion from ignorance here. Or, if it's not ignorance, it's simply blatant denial, this after just noting Price's work on the issue.*

If you intended to lateral the ball to Price why not do so from the start? My point was merely that no evidence had been brought to the table so why should I accept your statement that "the evidence is clearly opposite as you have it?"

David said: *I see no reason to accept mystery cult allegations on the grounds that we have no historical evidence of it.*

Dawson responded: *There's no historical evidence of the Osiris cult, the Dionysos cult, Mithraism, the Eleusinian mysteries, etc.? Here you put yourself in the dubious position of having to prove a negative. Do you think scholars invented these cults in modern times in order to view Christianity as "the great surviving mystery religion"*

*(Doherty, The Jesus Puzzle, p. 115)?*

No sir, you have concocted this dubious position you speak of. There is no historical evidence for the mystery cult **allegations**. In no way did that statement imply a position on the **existence** of these cults. The "evidence" I refer to pertains to the development of these cults and their potential influence on Christianity.

David: *Why is any scholar that disagrees with your position a 'Christian apologist'?*

Dawson: *I don't believe I have affirmed or practiced such a rule.*

Refer to our previous exchanges and observe where you have pinned this term on almost every Christian source presented, regardless of whether or not the author was "giving a defense." Also notice how you consistently use the "well I would expect this kind of thing from Christian apologists" response, which borders on ad hominem circumstantial.

Dawson: *Does Geivett get to speak for Paul? If so, why? What special knowledge of Paul's mental situation does Geivett have that is not available to the rest of us?*

Recall that you asked two questions: 1. How does Paul know he has received information from a supernatural

source? 2. How do we know that Paul has received information from a supernatural source?

With regards to question 1, your concerns about Geivett apply to me just as well, which serves to invalidate the whole inquiry. If not Geivett, why ask me? Why should I get to speak for Paul? What special knowledge of Paul's mental situation do I have that is not available for the rest? Surely you see that point you made shows your own question to be immaterial. Actually Geivett's expertise resides in the domain relevant to question 2.

Dawson: *haven't read Geivett's paper so I don't know if he addresses my questions or not. And nothing you provide here suggests that he does, other than that you recommend it in response to my questions. Is his paper available online, or if not can you recap any of his relevant points?*

No spoon feeding, remember? :P The mp3 of his presentation at the conference is online but I think its about 10\$ to download all of them. It is also published in the book, *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Cross and N.T. Wright Dialogue*.

Since you have pointed something to be missing, I take it you expect the Bible to answer your epistemic questions - modern requirements on an ancient text.

Dawson: *Conformity with the primacy of existence principle is a minimum requirement for accepting any ideational content as true*

On what grounds is that statement accepted to be true, if not from conformity with the primacy of existence principle?

Dawson: *Why is Paul an eyewitness of the risen Christ, but the man on trial making such a plea is not likewise an eyewitness?*

Your position is peculiar in that you insist on singling Paul out as the only testimony to be adjudicated (you already assume the experiences recorded in the Gospels are legend). My position, however, allows the Gospels, early church, etc. to validate Paul's experience and thus I do not need to put him on the stand alone. Also arguments for the existence of a personal God would lend credulity to supernatural experiences. So my point is that I don't need Paul's experience to testify own its own.

Dawson: *So a single claim by itself is not sufficient to convince you, but multiple claims to the same effect are? Apparently in your view, simply repeating claim (even if it's arbitrary?) will vouchsafe its credibility, is that right? It appears that your view of the world lacks a fundamental understanding pertaining to the proper orientation of the subject-object relationship.*

It amazes me how your misread my statements. I said, "experiences and testimonies **lend support to warranted belief**."

Dawson: *So if Jesus is no respecter of persons, why doesn't he just appear before me and everyone else? It would settle things quite quickly, and it would probably go a long way in averting heresies, apostasy, rogue cultish spin-offs, etc.*

Your assumption is that God is interested in saving everyone, or at least giving everyone an equal chance to believe. I don't hold to this, so my answer is simply that God chose to reveal Himself in a manner that would save the people He intended to save. Romans chapter 9 addresses this question.

Not sure what to make of your diatribe concerning James Kennedy. Did not see a citation for where he mentions this in passing. My position is that the Son shares all the characteristics of divinity (fully God).

Dawson's Conclusion: *In conclusion, we see that the objections and counterpoints which David has raised have already been anticipated in the critical literature, and are easily answered with a little digging. A fringe benefit to that digging is the discovery of more and more problems for the literalist Christian interpretation of the New Testament's stories. That what we have in the New Testament is a wellspring of legends and tall tales, is undeniable. Try as they may, Christian apologists, driven by their desire to protect a fantasy, will struggle in vain to validate their religious beliefs. Sadly, futility is their only reward.*

Not sure what critical literature you are referring to?

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Ah, David, you come back to me yet again!

David: "With regards to question 1, your concerns about Geivett apply to me just as well, which serves to invalidate the whole inquiry."

So in other words, neither you nor Geivett can explain how Paul knows that he has received information from a supernatural source. Is that right? Can you explain how it works? Or are you saying you can't explain this either?

David: "If not Geivett, why ask me?"

Geivett is not participating in this discussion, and from all appearances, he does not address my questions in his essay. But I am in a discussion with you, and since Paul's testimony rests on an appeal to revelation, it is a fair question: how does that work? How does Paul know? How can we know? In addressing a similar question, [John Frame finally confesses](#), "we know without knowing how we know." Not very informative, is it? Do you know something that John Frame does not know?

David: "Why should I get to speak for Paul?"

Originally you had indicated that Geivett could, so why couldn't you as well? Don't Christians all have "the mind of Christ"? Now you seem to be moving away from the position that either of you can address my questions. Is that correct?

David: "What special knowledge of Paul's mental situation do I have that is not available for the rest?"

See, that's the problem: Paul never explains it. He simply asserts that he has received knowledge from a supernatural source. So no one can explain it. I can see how Paul's failure to explain it would be an impediment in the world as my philosophy understands it. But in a world ruled by a supernatural being, why would this stop anyone from learning?

David: "Surely you see that point you made shows your own question to be immaterial."

It's certainly material, if I'm being asked to accept as knowledge a set of claims someone says he received via supernatural revelation. My questions simply show how inexplicable it is.

David: "Actually Geivett's expertise resides in the domain relevant to question 2."

So, what is Geivett's answer to my question #2 then?

David: "Since you have pointed something to be missing, I take it you expect the Bible to answer your epistemic questions - modern requirements on an ancient text."

If you claim that Christian has its own theory of concepts (I'm supposing this is what you have in mind here), then I would ask where it is laid out. If it is not in the bible, where is it? This is not a "modern requirement on an ancient text," for even ancient people used concepts. It's not like I'm asking to see where the bible explains how microwave ovens work. Conceptual ability is not a modern phenomenon. And if the bible is supposed to have been inspired by an omniscient and infallible source, why would it be wrong to expect something more impressive than the fanciful tales we read in it?

I wrote: *Conformity with the primacy of existence principle is a minimum requirement for accepting any ideational content as true*

David: "On what grounds is that statement accepted to be true, if not from conformity with the primacy of existence principle?"

Do you understand anything about the issue of metaphysical primacy? Of course, there's nothing faulty about a position which is consistent with the implications of its own fundamentals.

I asked: *Why is Paul an eyewitness of the risen Christ, but the man on trial making such a plea is not likewise an eyewitness?*

David: “Your position is peculiar in that you insist on singling Paul out as the only testimony to be adjudicated (you already assume the experiences recorded in the Gospels are legend). My position, however, allows the Gospels, early church, etc. to validate Paul’s experience and thus I do not need to put him on the stand alone.”

In other words, you need the later legends to validate an earlier appeal to revelation. That’s exactly what Geisler and Turek did.

David: “Also arguments for the existence of a personal God would lend credulity to supernatural experiences.”

Can you produce any argument for the existence of a personal god which does not violate the primacy of existence? (Hint: this is a principle you make use of every time you utter a truth claim.)

David: “So my point is that I don’t need Paul’s experience to testify own its own.”

In other words, it would not stand on its own. That’s a very interesting admission, David.

David: “I said, ‘experiences and testimonies lend support to warranted belief’.”

Do the experiences and testimonies of Joseph Smith’s fellow witnesses lend support to warranted belief in Mormonism?

I said: *So if Jesus is no respecter of persons, why doesn't he just appear before me and everyone else? It would settle things quite quickly, and it would probably go a long way in averting heresies, apostasy, rogue cultish spin-offs, etc.*

David: “Your assumption is that God is interested in saving everyone, or at least giving everyone an equal chance to believe. I don’t hold to this,”

This can be easily modified to suit this dodge. Why doesn’t Jesus just appear to everyone he wants to save, as Christianity holds that he did for Saul on the road to Damascus, instead of just appearing to Saul alone, and leaving it up to people who credulously accept the claim that the risen Jesus appeared to him as factual and seek to spread the gospel with arguments that are quite unconvincing? You see, by modifying it in this way, I’m no longer assuming that Jesus wants to save everyone. But why would D. James Kennedy say that it’s impossible for Jesus to appear before millions and millions of people? That was his dodge to the issue, by saying that Jesus is simply unable. You may not be willing to make that kind of statement. But surely your Jesus wants to save some people, no? Do you think there’s any point to dialoguing with me? As you can see, I’m able to answer your objections.

David: “so my answer is simply that God chose to reveal Himself in a manner that would save the people He intended to save.”

Did your god really “reveal Himself” to people, or did believers get raised up in this belief system, accepting it from an early age (such as [Van Til did](#), when he was overcome by imaginative fears), and it just stuck with them?

David: “Not sure what to make of your diatribe concerning James Kennedy. Did not see a citation for where he mentions this in passing. My position is that the Son shares all the characteristics of divinity (fully God).”

Listen to his sermon [The Sin of Unbelief \(Part 2\)](#), where he makes the following statement:

*Now Christ cannot appear personally to all of the billions and billions of people that have lived on the earth since that time, but we have the testimony of many of those that have seen him at that time....*

Would you disagree with Kennedy here? If so, how can this be? I thought believers got “the mind of Christ.”

David: “Not sure what critical literature you are referring to?”

The sources which I have cited.

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 25, 2008 2:27 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

avid: "With regards to question 1, your concerns about Geivett apply to me just as well, which serves to invalidate the whole inquiry."

Dawson: *So in other words, neither you nor Geivett can explain how Paul knows that he has received information from a supernatural source. Is that right? Can you explain how it works? Or are you saying you can't explain this either?*

In my original response to this issue, I addressed it to the best of my ability. I referred you to Geivett because he is an expert in the field of epistemology, much in the same manner that you referred me to Price who is an expert in first century mythology. Where does John Frame say that?

Of course I don't think anyone is going to have a thorough response to question #1, because the nature of the question goes beyond the bounds of the evidence we have in the Bible. No one is asking you to accept the claims of Paul alone; that is a restriction you have applied to yourself.

Dawson: *I wrote: Conformity with the primacy of existence principle is a minimum requirement for accepting any ideational content as true*

All I'm asking is how that statement can be shown to be true or false.

Dawson: *Of course, there's nothing faulty about a position which is consistent with the implications of its own fundamentals.*

Who said it was faulty? Not sure where you're coming from.

Dawson: *In other words, you need the later legends to validate an earlier appeal to revelation.*

Interesting how even after a long discussion of this, you continue to impute your own position to me. I use later historical accounts to clarify earlier ones. You say the Gospels read like fiction throughout, but I am willing to argue that they are firmly in the literary genre of historical biography.

Dawson: *Can you produce any argument for the existence of a personal god which does not violate the primacy of existence? (Hint: this is a principle you make use of every time you utter a truth claim.)*

Don't take your obscure position and hold it against me as if I must conform to it. I'm sure you are familiar with all the classical, evidential, and presuppositional arguments for the existence of God.

Dawson: *Do the experiences and testimonies of Joseph Smith's fellow witnesses lend support to warranted belief in Mormonism?*

Yes.

Dawson: *This can be easily modified to suit this dodge. Why doesn't Jesus just appear to everyone he wants to save, as Christianity holds that he did for Saul on the road to Damascus, instead of just appearing to Saul alone, and leaving it up to people who credulously accept the claim that the risen Jesus appeared to him as factual and seek to spread the gospel with arguments that are quite unconvincing? You see, by modifying it in this way, I'm no longer assuming that Jesus wants to save everyone. But why would D. James Kennedy say that it's impossible for Jesus to appear before millions and millions of people? That was his dodge to the issue, by saying that Jesus is simply unable. You may not be willing to make that kind of statement. But surely your Jesus wants to save some people, no? Do you think there's any point to dialoguing with me? As you can see, I'm able to answer your objections.*

I also don't hold to the position that Jesus wants to appear to everyone whom he wishes to save. This is similar to the kinds of sophomoric counterfactuals I see on other forums, such as "why didn't God give humans wings so



we could fly?"

I think dialoguing with you has many points that benefit both of us, and if God wishes to use this means to accomplish an end that is His prerogative. I am beginning work on my closing statement, in which I will demonstrate that you haven't answered my objections.

Dawson: *Would you disagree with Kennedy here? If so, how can this be? I thought believers got "the mind of Christ."*

Aside from the misunderstanding of what the mind of Christ is, I am not sure about Kennedy. There has been much debate over exactly how the Son experiences time, space etc. given the hypostatic union. Obviously the physical presence of the body is what he is referring to, but your inquiry seems to only require some sort of vision.

Dawson: *The sources which I have cited.*

Remember, citing an assertion does not constitute an argument. I will get to this in my closing statement.

[September 25, 2008 4:55 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "In my original response to this issue, I addressed it to the best of my ability. I referred you to Geivett because he is an expert in the field of epistemology,"

I see, so Geivett *does* get to speak for Paul after all? Of course, I'd like to know what epistemology has to do with revelation. Epistemology explains the steps we take in acquiring and validating our knowledge. But when people claim knowledge via revelation, they seem to be claiming knowledge which bypasses such steps.

David: "Where does John Frame say that?"

Click on the hyperlink that I included in my comment. Here's the URL:

<http://www.thirdmill.org/files/english/html/pt/PT.h.Frame.Presupp.Apol.1.html>

I'll quote Frame at length from the linked article:

I admit that it is difficult to construe the psychology of such faith. How is it that people come to believe a Word from God which contradicts all their other normal means of knowledge? How did Abraham come to know that the voice calling him to sacrifice his son (Gen. 22:1-18; cf. Heb. 11:17-19; James 2:21-24) was the voice of God? What the voice told him to do was contrary to fatherly instincts, normal ethical considerations, and even, apparently, contrary to other Words of God (Gen. 9:6). But he obeyed the voice and was blessed. Closer to our own experience: how is it that people come to believe in Jesus even though they have not, like Thomas, seen Jesus' signs and wonders (John 20:29)? ...I cannot explain the psychology here to the satisfaction of very many. In this case as in others (for we walk by faith, not by sight!) we may have to accept the fact even without an explanation of the fact. Somehow, God manages to get his Word across to us, despite the logical and psychological barriers. Without explaining how it works, Scripture describes in various ways a "supernatural factor" in divine-human communication. (a) It speaks of the power of the Word. The Word created all things (Gen. 1:3, etc.; Ps. 33:3-6; John 1:3) and directs the course of nature and history (Pss. 46:6; 148:5-8). What God says will surely come to pass (Isa. 55:11; Gen. 18:149; Deut. 18:21ff.). The gospel is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16; cf. Isa. 6:9-10; Luke 7:7ff.; Heb. 4:12). (b) Scripture also speaks of the personal power of the Holy Spirit operating with the Word (John 3:5; 1 Cor. 2:4,12ff.; 2 Cor. 3:15-18; 1 Thess. 1:5). Mysterious though the process may be, somehow God illumines the human mind to discern the divine source of the Word. We know without knowing how we know.

See that last statement there?

David: "Of course I don't think anyone is going to have a thorough response to question #1, because the nature of the question goes beyond the bounds of the evidence we have in the Bible."

I see. So, it's a mystery, eh?

David: "No one is asking you to accept the claims of Paul alone"

It sure seems that Paul was expecting his readers to accept his claim that he had received divine revelations from a supernatural source.

I wrote: *Conformity with the primacy of existence principle is a minimum requirement for accepting any ideational content as true*

David: "All I'm asking is how that statement can be shown to be true or false."

By an analysis of the concept of truth and its relationship to the subject-object relationship. Ask yourself: Which orientation between a subject and its objects, the primacy of consciousness or the primacy of existence, comports best with the concept of truth? The objective theory of truth recognizes its dependence on the primacy of existence, that is: the object of cognition holds metaphysical primacy over the subject. Here's a more simplified approach: ask yourself whether or not wishing makes a claim true. If not, why not?

David: "You say the Gospels read like fiction throughout, but I am willing to argue that they are firmly in the literary genre of historical biography."

Yes, I already know that you want to believe this.

I asked: *Can you produce any argument for the existence of a personal god which does not violate the primacy of existence? (Hint: this is a principle you make use of every time you utter a truth claim.)*

David: "Don't take your obscure position and hold it against me as if I must conform to it."

David, every position has implications with regard to the issue of metaphysical primacy, to the proper orientation of the subject-object relationship. That this issue is obscure to you only tells me that you've taken your views for granted with respect to these implications.

David: "I'm sure you are familiar with all the classical, evidential, and presuppositional arguments for the existence of God."

Yes, and none of them address the issue of metaphysical primacy, nor can any of them stand on the primacy of existence. They all trade on [stolen concepts](#). With respect to each approach to apologetics, the question I would ask is: what is its ultimate starting point? I [already showed how the proposed foundation of your worldview \("the Bible is the Word of God"\)](#) is far from fundamental and cannot reasonably serve as one's ultimate starting point (it stands on many prior assumptions).

I asked: *Do the experiences and testimonies of Joseph Smith's fellow witnesses lend support to warranted belief in Mormonism?*

David answered: "Yes."

So, are you Mormon now?

I wrote: *This can be easily modified to suit this dodge. Why doesn't Jesus just appear to everyone he wants to save, as Christianity holds that he did for Saul on the road to Damascus, instead of just appearing to Saul alone, and leaving it up to people who credulously accept the claim that the risen Jesus appeared to him as factual and seek to spread the gospel with arguments that are quite unconvincing? You see, by modifying it in this way, I'm no longer assuming that Jesus wants to save everyone. But why would D. James Kennedy say that it's impossible for Jesus to appear before millions and millions of people? That was his dodge to the issue, by saying that Jesus is simply unable. You may not be willing to make that kind of statement. But surely your Jesus wants to save some people, no? Do you think there's any point to dialoguing with me? As you can see, I'm able to answer your objections.*

David: "I also don't hold to the position that Jesus wants to appear to everyone whom he wishes to save."

It does not surprise me that you say this about Jesus. An imaginer exercises control over what he imagines. I can imagine Blarko, for instance, and Blarko is and does whatever I want Blarko to be and do. I could even say that

Blarko doesn't want to appear to everyone. Within the confines of my imagination, the object of my imagination conforms to my imagining.

David: "This is similar to the kinds of sophomoric counterfactuals I see on other forums, such as 'why didn't God give humans wings so we could fly?'"

Not at all. Recall that the NT characterizes its god as one which does not play favorites. And the bible does give the example of Jesus giving Paul a personal visit. That's quite special treatment there, a personal visit from Jesus. Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and numerous other individuals are claimed in the bible to have had such special treatment. At any rate, there is biblical precedent for the divine favor I've inquired on, unlike the desire to have wings. And the point I am making is relevant to the issue of salvation, which according to Christianity is supposed to be of chief importance. Jesus appearing before me would certainly settle a lot of questions and disputes, don't you think? According to the storybook, it did for Paul, who's characterized as a persecutor of the church (an activity I'm not even engaged in). But if your god is bashful, afraid to show itself, don't blame me. Indeed, the outcome is just as we should expect if your god is merely imaginary: it doesn't make any appearances. Only your explanation for this is different from mine. You say it doesn't want to. Again, one could make such claims about anything in his imagination.

I asked: *Would you disagree with Kennedy here? If so, how can this be? I thought believers got "the mind of Christ."*

David: "Aside from the misunderstanding of what the mind of Christ is,"

What misunderstanding? Whose misunderstanding? Is this explained somewhere? Is it or is it not the case that all believers have "the mind of Christ"? How about the Holy Spirit? Does it not guide believers on these things? Could the Holy Spirit be telling one believer one thing, and another believer something completely opposite? Is one or the other (or both) deceived?

David: "I am not sure about Kennedy. There has been much debate over exactly how the Son experiences time, space etc. given the hypostatic union. Obviously the physical presence of the body is what he is referring to, but your inquiry seems to only require some sort of vision."

I see. Pretty hard to commit to an answer one way or another, isn't it?

I wrote: *The sources which I have cited.*

David: "Remember, citing an assertion does not constitute an argument."

Okay, I'll keep this in mind, even though I never affirmed that citing an assertion necessarily does constitute an argument. However, I'm sure you'd agree, if the citation is constituted by numerous assertions which are assembled to support the inference to a stated conclusion, then it would contain an argument and citing it could very well constitute an argument. At any rate, you were wondering which critical literature I was referring to, and my answer is the sources which I have cited.

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 25, 2008 8:20 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson: *I see, so Geivett does get to speak for Paul after all? Of course, I'd like to know what epistemology has to do with revelation. Epistemology explains the steps we take in acquiring and validating our knowledge. But when people claim knowledge via revelation, they seem to be claiming knowledge which bypasses such steps.*

In my original response I already covered the "steps we taking in acquiring and validating our knowledge" with respect to revelation, and I'm sure Dr. Geivett could lend more clarity to the issue.

Dawson: *It sure seems that Paul was expecting his readers to accept his claim that he had received divine revelations from a supernatural source.*

What does that demonstrate? His original audience lacked things you have privilege to and vice versa.

Given your definition, then I don't think any of the classical arguments for the existence of God violate the primacy of existence. You still haven't shown **why** its true, which is what I'm asking.

Dawson: *Yes, I already know that you want to believe this.*

Wanting implies a lack of something; rest assured I actually believe this.

Dawson: *David, every position has implications with regard to the issue of metaphysical primacy, to the proper orientation of the subject-object relationship. That this issue is obscure to you only tells me that you've taken your views for granted with respect to these implications.*

Perhaps obscure was a bad word but instead asinine; why would I give an argument that axiomatically assumed the primacy of consciousness? Only if you define existence in naturalistic terms would there be any problem with the arguments for the existence of God.

Dawson: *I already showed how the proposed foundation of your worldview ("the Bible is the Word of God") is far from fundamental and cannot reasonably serve as one's ultimate starting point (it stands on many prior assumptions).*

I think you've been arguing in your sleep; where have you shown this is "far from fundamental and cannot reasonable serve as one's ultimate starting point?"

Dawson *So, are you Mormon now?*

So you think that if a thing lends support to a particular warranted belief, then someone is obligated to hold that belief?

Dawson: *Not at all. Recall that the NT characterizes its god as one which does not play favorites.*

I invite you to substantiate that assertion.

Dawson: *What misunderstanding? Whose misunderstanding? Is this explained somewhere? Is it or is it not the case that all believers have "the mind of Christ"? How about the Holy Spirit? Does it not guide believers on these things? Could the Holy Spirit be telling one believer one thing, and another believer something completely opposite? Is one or the other (or both) deceived?*

I'll try to be very clear. The "mind of Christ" does not imply that all Christians agree on a given issue. The Holy Spirit does guide believers, but that also does not necessarily implicate agreement on all issues. And no, the Holy Spirit could not contradict Himself.

[September 26, 2008 2:07 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote: *I see, so Geivett does get to speak for Paul after all? Of course, I'd like to know what epistemology has to do with revelation. Epistemology explains the steps we take in acquiring and validating our knowledge. But when people claim knowledge via revelation, they seem to be claiming knowledge which bypasses such steps.*

David: "In my original response I already covered the 'steps we taking in acquiring and validating our knowledge' with respect to revelation,"

Can you refresh me on this? I'd like to know first how one becomes aware of the content of said revelation.

I wrote: *It sure seems that Paul was expecting his readers to accept his claim that he had received divine revelations from a supernatural source.*

David asked: "What does that demonstrate?"

It demonstrates that Paul was expecting his claims to be accepted on his say so, contrary to what you had earlier

indicated.

David: "His original audience lacked things you have privilege to and vice versa."

Exactly. They lacked the written gospels, to which you appeal as corroboration of Paul's claims in his epistles.

David: "Given your definition, then I don't think any of the classical arguments for the existence of God violate the primacy of existence."

Can you show how the classical arguments for the existence of a god are *compatible* with the primacy of existence? This I would like to see.

David: "You still haven't shown why its true, which is what I'm asking."

Actually I have, but you're just not familiar with it. (See for instance [here](#) and [here](#).) I asked a few questions in my last comment to help you find your way to this truth on your own. For instance, yourself whether or not wishing makes a claim true. If not, why not?

David: "Wanting implies a lack of something;"

I hope to quote this statement in a later blog. By the way, does your god ever want?

Dawson: David, every position has implications with regard to the issue of metaphysical primacy, to the proper orientation of the subject-object relationship. That this issue is obscure to you only tells me that you've taken your views for granted with respect to these implications.

David: "why would I give an argument that axiomatically assumed the primacy of consciousness?"

People do this quite frequently (theists for instance), and for a variety of motivations. But they are never in the interest of preserving the truth.

David: "Only if you define existence in naturalistic terms would there be any problem with the arguments for the existence of God."

The concept 'existence' is an axiomatic concept. It is not defined in terms of prior concepts. So obviously I can't be the case that I "define existence in naturalistic terms." To do so would be to commit the fallacy of the stolen concept.

I wrote: *I already showed how the proposed foundation of your worldview ("the Bible is the Word of God") is far from fundamental and cannot reasonably serve as one's ultimate starting point (it stands on many prior assumptions).*

David: "I think you've been arguing in your sleep; where have you shown this is "far from fundamental and cannot reasonable serve as one's ultimate starting point?"

Perhaps you're sleep-reading, David. See my 17 Sept. comment [here](#), where I examine your proposed foundation "the Bible is the Word of God." I gave several reasons why this cannot be fundamental. Do you remember this?

I asked: *So, are you Mormon now?*

David: "So you think that if a thing lends support to a particular warranted belief, then someone is obligated to hold that belief?"

No, I simply asked, since you have affirmed that "the experiences and testimonies of Joseph Smith's fellow witnesses lend support to warranted belief in Mormonism," if you're a Mormon. Why not simply answer the question? If you hold that the experiences and testimonies of Joseph Smith's fellow witnesses lend support to warranted belief in their claims, and yet you do not ascribe to Mormonism, then apparently you think a belief can be warranted and yet rejected at the same time. Am I misunderstanding you here?

I wrote: *Not at all. Recall that the NT characterizes its god as one which does not play favorites.*

David: "I invite you to substantiate that assertion."

So, you think your god does play favorites?

I wrote: *What misunderstanding? Whose misunderstanding? Is this explained somewhere? Is it or is it not the case that all believers have "the mind of Christ"? How about the Holy Spirit? Does it not guide believers on these things? Could the Holy Spirit be telling one believer one thing, and another believer something completely opposite? Is one or the other (or both) deceived?*

David: "I'll try to be very clear. The 'mind of Christ' does not imply that all Christians agree on a given issue."

I see. What exactly does it imply?

David: "The Holy Spirit does guide believers,"

I'd really like to know how this works. Can you explain how you are guided by the Holy Spirit, and when you're so guided, do you know you're being guided by the Holy Spirit and not, say, some demon or other invisible magic being? I just wonder how one makes these determinations when it all seems so internal and subjective, without any objective inputs to assure your deductions.

David: "but that also does not necessarily implicate agreement on all issues."

So, believers are guided by the Holy Spirit, but they can also hold completely different views on the same thing? And yet....

David: "And no, the Holy Spirit could not contradict Himself."

You're on safe ground here, David: Something that does not exist cannot contradict itself.

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 26, 2008 8:45 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson: *Can you refresh me on this? I'd like to know first how one becomes aware of the content of said revelation.*

Sense experience.

Dawson: *It demonstrates that Paul was expecting his claims to be accepted on his say so, contrary to what you had earlier indicated.*

Let's look again at what I said, "David: "No one is asking you to accept the claims of Paul alone"

Unless you think you are part of Paul's original intended audience I don't see how your statement could make any sense.

Dawson: *For instance, yourself whether or not wishing makes a claim true. If not, why not?*

I am aware that existence is independent of my awareness of it, but that isn't saying much is it? ;)

Dawson: *By the way, does your god ever want?*

Rather than leave me to assume your intentions, could you ask the full question you have in mind? Certainly this isn't a real inquiry as it stands?

Dawson: *The concept 'existence' is an axiomatic concept. It is not defined in terms of prior concepts. So obviously I can't be the case that I "define existence in naturalistic terms." To do so would be to commit the fallacy of the stolen concept.*



Does existence axiomatically exclude the supernatural in your worldview?

Oh you mean where you asserted a bunch of stuff and linked to a previous article. Yes, I have that bookmarked for future read. Since the rest of your statements were unsupported I skipped them. I will address them in my closing statement.

Dawson: *No, I simply asked, since you have affirmed that “the experiences and testimonies of Joseph Smith’s fellow witnesses lend support to warranted belief in Mormonism,” if you’re a Mormon. Why not simply answer the question? If you hold that the experiences and testimonies of Joseph Smith’s fellow witnesses lend support to warranted belief in their claims, and yet you do not ascribe to Mormonism, then apparently you think a belief can be warranted and yet rejected at the same time. Am I misunderstanding you here?*

I find much more warrant for other competing beliefs, and also things which serve to unjustify the belief break down any support the experiences alone provide.

David: “I invite you to substantiate that assertion.”

Dawson: *So, you think your god does play favorites?*

Debate trick #239. Dodge substantiating a claim by asking your opponent a question which diverts an explanation to him. :P

David: “I’ll try to be very clear. The ‘mind of Christ’ does not imply that all Christians agree on a given issue.”

I see. What exactly does it imply?

Ok, let’s look at some verses to see what Paul says on the subject:

1) Philippians 1:27:

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,

2) I Corinthians 1:10:

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

3) I Corinthians 2:16:

“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

There is a sense in #1 and 2 in which Paul encourages his fellow believers to seek unity. He certainly didn’t assume that they would automatically unify; he addresses the problems among them in detail.

#3 is a bit different, and to bring out the difference look at the whole unit of thought (or whatever you want to call it).

Starting at verse 8

8None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory

Hmm, let’s ignore the fact that earlier you seemed to think Paul was ignorant of the rulers’ treatment of Jesus and move on...probably just a coincidence that he used rulers in this context... he was probably referring to those demons in the heavenly places. :P

10these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

12Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

13And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual

14The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

15The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

16“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

Paul is talking about how the man receives wisdom from the Spirit. The last verse is rather trick to translate because of the pronoun given as the object of the preposition in the phrase, “to instruct him.” This does not imply that one is to instruct the Lord (as English syntax may hint), but instead that one is to teach “the mind of the Lord” to others. The whole crux of his teaching here is that Christians have access to receive and teach the wisdom of God because of the “things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.”

But right after this Paul moves on to address divisions in the church at Corinth:

### Chapter 3

1But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it.

Dawson: *I'd really like to know how this works. Can you explain how you are guided by the Holy Spirit, and when you're so guided, do you know you're being guided by the Holy Spirit and not, say, some demon or other invisible magic being? I just wonder how one makes these determinations when it all seems so internal and subjective, without any objective inputs to assure your deductions.*

That's a fair question, and certainly one which I have pondered since I became a Christian. There are times when the things I consider to be “of myself” are simply contradicted by urges against my nature. For instance, I used to enjoy abusing various substances and yet I read in the Bible that I should respect my body. I prayed that I would want to stop abusing substances, and lost the urge to do so and gained the urge to fill the lacuna with positive activities. Now this is admittedly subjective and could perhaps be explained away by some clever psychological rigging (I was prepared by my environment somehow). The objective input to judge the guidance of the Spirit is the Bible.

Dawson: *So, believers are guided by the Holy Spirit, but they can also hold completely different views on the same thing? And yet....*

Ok its late which means I am cranking out lame analogies galore:

Can two boats guided by the same wind travel in different directions? Perhaps if they were both looking at the same map they could come to more agreement, but even the art of reading the map is difficult and may result in some variance. Therefore, there is some room for traveling in different directions though of course only one path is the straight path to the destination; however, the paths get straighter and more aligned over time and the boats don't lose sight of each other because they are aiming at the same destination and using the same map and being blown by the same wind. Yet, the captain of each ship must sail his own boat to the best of his ability.

[September 26, 2008 11:07 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson: *Can you show how the classical arguments for the existence of a god are compatible with the primacy of existence? This I would like to see*

Since you are the expert on the primacy of existence, I will outline some arguments and you can tell me exactly how they violate this axiom, cool?

### The Cosmological Argument

1. Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence, either in the necessity of its own nature or in an external cause.
2. If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God.
3. The universe exists.
4. Therefore, the explanation of the universe's existence is God.

### **The Kalam Cosmological Argument**

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

### **The Teleological Argument**

1. The fine-tuning of the universe is due either to physical necessity, chance, or design.
2. It is not due to physical necessity or chance.
3. Therefore, it is due to design.

### **The Moral Argument**

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.

### **The Ontological Argument**

1. It is possible that a maximally great being (God) exists.
2. If it is possible that a maximally great being exists, then a maximally great being exists in some possible world.
3. If a maximally great being exists in some possible world, then it exists in every possible world.
4. If a maximally great being exists in every possible world, then it exists in the actual world.
5. Therefore, a maximally great being exists in the actual world.
6. Therefore, a maximally great being exists.
7. Therefore, God exists.

### **The Transcendental Argument**

This is a complicated argument, but a summary of the general form of transcendental arguments is available on the [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#).

The general form:

1. Some proposition Q about our mental life, the truth of which is immediately apparent or presumed by the skeptic's position.
2. The truth of some extra-mental proposition P, our knowledge of which is questioned by the skeptic, is a necessary condition of Q.
3. Therefore P.

Alvina Plantinga has recently written an article called [Naturalism Defeated\(pdf\)](#)

[September 28, 2008 11:26 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I asked: *Can you refresh me on this? I'd like to know first how one becomes aware of the content of said revelation.*

David: "Sense experience."

Where did you get this answer, from Paul? Sense experience of precisely what? When Paul claims to have knowledge by revelation, what did he perceive with his senses to give him this knowledge? And what is the next step in the process? Certainly it does not stop with sense experience, does it? Paul's view of perception seems quite self-contradictory. He thinks that "invisible things" can be "clearly seen" (Rom. 1:20). But if something is "clearly seen," on what basis could he turn around and call it invisible?

I wrote: *It demonstrates that Paul was expecting his claims to be accepted on his say so, contrary to what you had earlier indicated.*

David: "Let's look again at what I said, 'No one is asking you to accept the claims of Paul alone' Unless you think you are part of Paul's original intended audience I don't see how your statement could make any sense."

So would you admit that Paul expected his immediate audience to accept his claims on his say so? I still see no alternative to accepting Paul's claims on his own say so as well. There's a lot in his writings that is not

corroborated in other writings, even on the literalist view. For instance, Jesus' appearance to James and the 500 brethren.

I wrote: *For instance, ask yourself whether or not wishing makes a claim true. If not, why not?*

David: "I am aware that existence is independent of my awareness of it, but that isn't saying much is it? ;)"

Do you think that the relationship between your consciousness and the objects of your awareness is of no philosophical concern? Your apparent insouciance here suggests as much, which tells me a lot - in fact, all I need to know. In fact, however, the fact that existence exists independent of consciousness has worldview-wide implications, since philosophy is the software of the mind, and all our recognitions, identifications, affirmations, inferences, deductions, evaluations, estimations and conclusion are activities of consciousness, and attending all these activities is the relationship between subject and object. The recognition that existence exists independent of consciousness tells us that the primacy of consciousness is not available to you as a thinker. Which means: your epistemology, if it is to be reliable, needs to be wholly consistent with the primacy of existence, otherwise it violates a fundamental truth, namely that existence exists independent of your consciousness of it. So again I ask, does wishing make it so? Yes or no? If not, why not? And how consistent is your worldview with the answer you give for this?

I asked: *By the way, does your god ever want?*

David: "Rather than leave me to assume your intentions, could you ask the full question you have in mind? Certainly this isn't a real inquiry as it stands?"

David, you're a spokesman for your god. So I asked you a very straightforward question: does your god ever want? Why does this question cause you to squirm in this manner? Instead of answering, you take what appears to be a variant of debate trick #239 (see below).

I wrote: *The concept 'existence' is an axiomatic concept. It is not defined in terms of prior concepts. So obviously I can't be the case that I "define existence in naturalistic terms." To do so would be to commit the fallacy of the stolen concept.*

David: "Does existence axiomatically exclude the supernatural in your worldview?"

The assertion of the supernatural does violate the axioms (since it always involves or leads to the primacy of consciousness), but the recognition of this fact is not itself axiomatic. I have explained this in my interaction with Bahnsen's defense of supernaturalism.

David: "Oh you mean where you asserted a bunch of stuff and linked to a previous article. Yes, I have that bookmarked for future read. Since the rest of your statements were unsupported I skipped them. I will address them in my closing statement."

Here is what I wrote in response to your proposed foundation "the Bible is the Word of God":

Well, for one thing, your founding affirmation assumes the truth of mine; mine would have to be true before you could chance to propose yours. See for instance my blog [Theism and Its Piggyback Starting Point](#). Also, in tandem with my previous point, the affirmation you propose as your founding truth is not conceptually irreducible, which means that it assumes prior truths which would need to be identified and explored for any prior assumptions they make. Also, the statement "the Bible is the Word of God" does not identify a perceptually self-evident fact. Even if we accept it as true, it would have to be the conclusion of prior inference, which itself would ultimately need to be rooted in the perceptually self-evident. We could spend days and weeks exploring why one might accept it as truth, where as 'existence exists' identifies a fact which is perceptually self-evident, undeniable, inescapable. Another concern is that it is not undeniable: I can deny the assertion that "the Bible is the Word of God" and I am in no way undercutting truths which I do affirm or contradicting facts which I accept as facts. Another problem (and I'll stop with this), is: what exactly is it referring to? It certainly does not have the scope of reference that 'existence exists' has (since 'existence' is the widest of all concepts, it includes everything which exists), and seems to be irrelevant to pretty much everything. Its applicability is wholly artificial, forced as it is as an interpretative filter on a reality which has no need for such notions. To justify the claim that it has relevance in our world, the one affirming this claim would probably resort to the claim that the universe and everything within it were created by said "God." But this again is not perceptually self-evident; that the universe was created by an act of consciousness (e.g., "God

spoke the universe into existence") is a claim for which I have certainly seen no good evidence whatsoever.

Your proposed foundation is as good as "*The Wizard of Oz* is the Blurb of Klaigh." To which we can all say, "So what?" In the case of my starting point, which yours has to make use of without acknowledging (cf. "borrowing"), you can feign a similar response, however your choices and actions betray that you have no choice but to accept existence as an inviolate, fundamental and irreducible fact which needs to be adhered to on its own terms.

I wrote: *No, I simply asked, since you have affirmed that "the experiences and testimonies of Joseph Smith's fellow witnesses lend support to warranted belief in Mormonism," if you're a Mormon. Why not simply answer the question? If you hold that the experiences and testimonies of Joseph Smith's fellow witnesses lend support to warranted belief in their claims, and yet you do not ascribe to Mormonism, then apparently you think a belief can be warranted and yet rejected at the same time. Am I misunderstanding you here?*

David: "I find much more warrant for other competing beliefs, and also things which serve to unjustify the belief break down any support the experiences alone provide."

This is rather vague. So are you, or are you not a Mormon? You have stated that it is a warranted belief. Or did I misunderstand you?

David said: "I invite you to substantiate that assertion."

I asked: *So, you think your god does play favorites?*

David then responded: "Debate trick #239. Dodge substantiating a claim by asking your opponent a question which diverts an explanation to him. :P"

#239, eh? That's quite a high number. If you have an enumerated list, I'd like to see it. Otherwise I'd think you're exaggerating here. (You complained earlier about me resorting to "rhetoric," are you now doing the same thing?) At any rate, since you have more familiarity with your god than I apparently do, it is logical that I ask you questions like this. You wanted me to substantiate an assumption I made about your god, so we might as well cut to the chase: does your god play favorites, or not? You do think your god is a just god, do you not? Impartiality is a non-negotiable component to a rational conception of justice. So, you let me know.

David: "I'll try to be very clear. The 'mind of Christ' does not imply that all Christians agree on a given issue."

I see. What exactly does it imply?

David: "Ok, let's look at some verses to see what Paul says on the subject: 1) Philippians 1:27:

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,"

So here it appears that "the mind of Christ" involves governing one's own behavior in accordance with what Paul calls a life "worthy of the gospel of Christ." It seems to be code, then, for going along with the party line. Of course, who, according to Christianity, has a life "worthy of the gospel of Christ"? I thought we are all unworthy to begin with, and that nothing we can do (not even efforts to modify our behavior) can overcome this. The collectivistic overtones here of course are hard to miss. Paul wants his congregants to act as if they had "one mind," which of course can't even be faked very well. There is of course much striving in the churches that I've seen, as believers strive to carry on the pretense that they are of "one mind" on things, when in fact they simply aren't. The goal here is to erase personal identity and adopt the identity of a group. I'll stick with my own mind, thank you.

David: "(2) I Corinthians 1:10: I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment."

This confirms my above assessment: striving to adopt "the mind of Christ" involves erasing one's own identity and faking cohesiveness with the group. This certainly does not endow a believer with any special power, even though Paul carried on as if he were "guided by the spirit" and thus benefiting from supernatural direction. I wonder what Paul would think of Christendom today, with so many different sects and denominations and schisms and all. Internal division seems to be one of the defining attributes of Christianity throughout history. "One mind" they surely haven't got.

David: “3) I Corinthians 2:16: “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.”

We’ll discuss this one below.

David: “There is a sense in #1 and 2 in which Paul encourages his fellow believers to seek unity. He certainly didn’t assume that they would automatically unify; ”

Right. The “mind of Christ” (if that’s what he has in mind in passages #1 and 2 above) is something believers have to try to effect on their own, through self-policing according to the prevailing ordinances of the congregation to which they belong. There’s no otherworldly bestowal here, there’s no supernatural indwelling that takes place. It’s an effected disposition which requires the believer himself to adopt and maintain. When a group of believers “have the mind of Christ,” they are in fact distinct minds seeking to act as if they were all “with one mind,” with the same mind as they imagine Jesus having, an image which of course will vary from individual to individual. Paul’s call to agreement in I Cor. 1:10 is but a call to erase individuality, to suppress one’s own personal judgments in the interest of aligning them with the group. I wouldn’t be the first to point out that Christianity fosters a form of group-think. Those who think differently are to be shunned. This gives rise to a community of surveillance, which in turn breeds a culture of dishonesty and distrust.

David: “#3 is a bit different, and to bring out the difference look at the whole unit of thought (or whatever you want to call it). Starting at verse 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory Hmm, let’s ignore the fact that earlier you seemed to think Paul was ignorant of the rulers’ treatment of Jesus and move on...probably just a coincidence that he used rulers in this context... he was probably referring to those demons in the heavenly places. :P”

He may very well have been referring to supernatural spirits here. I’ve cited numerous sources which affirm this. Indeed, when people are so caught up in the imaginary, as Paul was, it’s hard to know with any high degree of confidence what realm he has in mind in the pronouncements he makes.

David: “10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.”

So what sense experience did they have here which leads to the knowledge that Paul has in mind here? Earlier you affirmed that sense experience is the means by which one acquires awareness of the content of revelation. “through the Spirit” suggests a supernatural rather than biological process like sense experience.

David: “For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.”

Of course, one could say anything about something that is imaginary.

David: “12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.”

So how does the reception process work, and how can one know that he has received “the Spirit who is from God”? How does the believer distinguish between what he calls “the Spirit who is from God” from something he may merely be imagining? I see no answers to such questions in what Paul writes; he seems not even to have considered or anticipated them.

David: “13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual”

So how does the believer learn these words from “the Spirit”? Are you sure they’re not using words taught to them by other human beings? Also, what exactly is the distinguishing essential which characterizes “human wisdom”? Clearly Paul thinks it’s inferior to “wisdom... taught by the Spirit.” I wonder what value the latter has for life on earth.

David: “14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

This is actually code. What Paul is actually conceding is that the *rational* person does not accept these things, because they are irrational. It’s not a question of not being able to understand them. I can understand things



stated in the bible just as I can in other storybooks, like *The Wizard of Oz* and the *Harry Potter* series. I'm simply being consistent by recognizing that all fictional stories are non-factual. What Paul is invoking here is Device 2 - discrediting "the world." The underlying premise here is clearly subjective: if you believe the proscribed Christian claims, you will be transformed from a "natural man" to a "spiritual man," endowed with some supernatural ability to understand "the things of the Spirit." Simply believing and loving an invisible magic being is sufficient to make this transformation. You can't get much more subjective than this.

David: "15 The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one."

In other words, he's above being judged. Of course, we know that's not true. If this so-called "spiritual person" makes choices, he is open to judgment. We all are.

David: "16 'For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ. Paul is talking about how the man receives wisdom from the Spirit. The last verse is rather tricky to translate because of the pronoun given as the object of the preposition in the phrase, 'to instruct him'. This does not imply that one is to instruct the Lord (as English syntax may hint), but instead that one is to teach "the mind of the Lord" to others."

I'd think this would be easy to correct in English, if in fact your view is correct. Since "mind" here is apparently what you believe is the proper antecedent for the object of the verb "instruct", and since it is common in English to render "mind" with the third person inanimate pronoun "it", it might be better to translate this verse using the English pronoun "it" instead of "him." But even the verb "instruct" here seems off. You prefer the verb "teach," which would go better with your interpretation. Hence it might better look like this:

"For who has understood the mind of the Lord so much as to teach it [to others]? But we have the mind of Christ."

None of the translations I checked do this, however. Most have the verse read "instruct him," while the CEV has the whole verse read "The Scriptures ask, 'Has anyone ever known the thoughts of the Lord or given him advice?' But we understand what Christ is thinking." This version tends to take the meaning of the passage in a different direction. Regardless, Paul has an annoying habit of posing questions which he does not clearly answer, which is not an informative method at all.

David: "The whole crux of his teaching here is that Christians have access to receive and teach the wisdom of God because of the 'things God has revealed to us through the Spirit'."

None of this is helpful at all in informing how it all works. As you seem to be admitting here, it all reduces to the claim to having "access" to some mystical source of knowledge, without explaining what this means, how it works, how errors can be detected and corrected, etc. One could claim all kinds of things and say they were "revealed" to him by some supernatural source. Is "access to receive and teach the wisdom of God" just another way of saying you can read the bible? Or is it something distinct from this? Is this "wisdom of God" which believers have already laid out in the bible, or is it something in addition to what we read in the bible? What you've given so far is so vague that it could be used to justify any mystical claims, from Reverend Phelps to Jim Jones to David Koresh.

Recall that earlier you had stated that sense experience is the means by which we acquire awareness of the content of revelation. I'm still trying to see how all of this fits together with the rest of what you have given here to form a workable epistemology. It seems to be going in different directions, the one outer, the other inner. Clearly none of this safeguards against divisions, for they are rife throughout Christendom today (so much for Christian believers being "with one mind"). Also, there's no discussion here of conceptual method, which is a fundamental defect to all this, since concepts are the method by which we integrate and retain the knowledge we have learned. Indeed, if people did not understand how the mind forms concepts, they might ascribe the knowledge they do have (or claim to have) to some supernatural source (i.e., to a source which they can only imagine), especially if they have no reliable method of distinguishing between reality and imagination, a liability which is characteristic of supernaturalism.

David: "But right after this Paul moves on to address divisions in the church at Corinth: Chapter 3 1But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it."

Again, not at all helpful here.

*I wrote: I'd really like to know how this works. Can you explain how you are guided by the Holy Spirit, and when you're so guided, do you know you're being guided by the Holy Spirit and not, say, some demon or other invisible magic being? I just wonder how one makes these determinations when it all seems so internal and subjective, without any objective inputs to assure your deductions.*

David: "That's a fair question, and certainly one which I have pondered since I became a Christian. There are times when the things I consider to be "of myself" are simply contradicted by urges against my nature."

Whose urges? Are these conflicts internal to you, or between you and the supernatural?

David: "For instance, I used to enjoy abusing various substances and yet I read in the Bible that I should respect my body. I prayed that I would want to stop abusing substances, and lost the urge to do so and gained the urge to fill the lacuna with positive activities. Now this is admittedly subjective and could perhaps be explained away by some clever psychological rigging (I was prepared by my environment somehow)."

I don't think it would require "clever psychological rigging" at all to explain a turnabout like this. Clearly you wanted to change, and you put effort into making that change happen. I remember back when I was 19 I used to smoke cigarettes. I had a two-pack-a-day habit. It was really difficult to stop. But I did it. And I did it by sheer willpower. I made a vow to myself that I would not take my habit into my 20's, and I succeeded, all on my own. No supernatural agents made this happen; I take full credit myself.

David: "The objective input to judge the guidance of the Spirit is the Bible."

In other words, a storybook, specifically one which invites the reader into the playground of his imagination as he reads about supernatural spirits, miracles, demon possession, doomsday scenarios, miracle healings, etc. Not objective in the least. Indeed, taking such storybooks seriously cause a person to lose sight of the distinction between the actual and the imaginary.

*I wrote: So, believers are guided by the Holy Spirit, but they can also hold completely different views on the same thing? And yet....*

David: "Ok its late which means I am cranking out lame analogies galore: Can two boats guided by the same wind travel in different directions? Perhaps if they were both looking at the same map they could come to more agreement, but even the art of reading the map is difficult and may result in some variance. Therefore, there is some room for traveling in different directions though of course only one path is the straight path to the destination; however, the paths get straighter and more aligned over time and the boats don't lose sight of each other because they are aiming at the same destination and using the same map and being blown by the same wind. Yet, the captain of each ship must sail his own boat to the best of his ability."

I'm not sure how that answers my question. It does not even represent the history of divisions within Christianity. If anything, it seems that the divisions within Christianity are widening and deepening all the time. And they get downright nasty and vicious, too. Put a Calvinist and an Arminian in the same room together, and it won't be long until they're going after each other's throat. The same with Methodists and Mennonites, Presbyterians and Catholics, Vantillians and Clarkians. The internal squabbles between these various camps can quickly foam over into sustained incendiary conflagrations. You must know what I'm talking about. It's all over the net, and it's ugly. What's humorous is how both sides of these conflicts are always claiming to have the true Christian viewpoint on their side. Some "mind of Christ" here. I guess the Holy Spirit has taken a holiday.

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 28, 2008 9:20 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "Since you are the expert on the primacy of existence, I will outline some arguments and you can tell me exactly how they violate this axiom, cool?"

All the arguments you outlined violate the axioms by virtue of their affirmation of conclusions which assume the metaphysical primacy of consciousness. The Judeo-Christian notion of 'god' (as well as Islamic, Mormon and other

theistic variants) entails the metaphysical primacy of consciousness. I've substantiated this in numerous places throughout my blog. Any argument which attempts to secure a conclusion which assumes or entails the primacy of consciousness can be rejected by virtue of this very condition.

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 28, 2008 9:36 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson,

If God exists then obviously He doesn't violate the primacy of existence, right? How can you say these arguments' conclusion do so without already assuming He doesn't exist?

Also one of my more philosophically minded friends commented on your critique of the Christian worldview's founding proposition. I will leave him anonymous as he doesn't want to get involved; nevertheless his summary was interesting:

*To summarize, I think Dawson is confusing the chronological priority of propositions (what must be true to even formulate the biblical worldview?) with logical priority (how do we logically justify these chronologically prior propositions?) The whole point of revelational foundationalism is that there are a lot of things which are obviously true ("existence exists"; "an external world exists"; "events we perceive are correlated to events in the external world"; etc), but which we cannot rationally justify without reference to God's objective revelation. Revelational foundationalism works backward by first assuming these truths, so as to find justification for them; then justifying them with reference to Scripture.*

[September 28, 2008 9:54 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "If God exists then obviously He doesn't violate the primacy of existence, right?"

This is like saying, 'If an irrational statement were true, then it wouldn't be irrational'. But an irrational statement is an irrational statement, even if one wants to pretend it is true. The very notion of a god, especially the Judeo-Christian notion, is ineluctably seated on the primacy of consciousness, so questions like this are futile.

David: "How can you say these arguments' conclusion do so without already assuming He doesn't exist?"

By recognizing that they could never get off the ground with an intact understanding of the primacy of existence. They seek to establish a conclusion which is inescapably seated on the primacy of consciousness. They are motivated by the desire to centralize the origin of the universe, of knowledge, of norms of knowing, etc., in a \*subject\*, thus granting the subject of cognition metaphysical primacy over all its objects (for those objects are creations of the subject). This is also known as metaphysical subjectivism. For a few pointers on this, I refer you to a few select articles of mine (there are plenty more, but I thought you could start with these):

[Confessions of a Vantillian Subjectivist](#)

[Only Two Worldviews?](#)

[Gods and Square Circles](#)

[The Axioms and the Primacy of Existence](#)

[Theism and Subjective Metaphysics](#)

[Common Ground Part 3: Metaphysics](#)

There are numerous others I could link to here, but this should be sufficient to help you start familiarizing yourself with the relevant issues.

David: “Also one of my more philosophically minded friends commented on your critique of the Christian worldview’s founding proposition. I will leave him anonymous as he doesn’t want to get involved; nevertheless his summary was interesting: *To summarize, I think Dawson is confusing the chronological priority of propositions (what must be true to even formulate the biblical worldview?) with logical priority (how do we logically justify these chronologically prior propositions?) The whole point of revelational foundationalism is that there are a lot of things which are obviously true (“existence exists”; “an external world exists”; “events we perceive are correlated to events in the external world”; etc), but which we cannot rationally justify without reference to God’s objective revelation. Revelational foundationalism works backward by first assuming these truths, so as to find justification for them; then justifying them with reference to Scripture.*”

I can understand why your friend wants to remain anonymous. First he seeks to dichotomize the role of a starting point by splitting it into two types: chronological and logical. He does this in order to show that I have confused these types, when in fact he nowhere shows that I have (he simply asserts that I have and provides no support for this). In fact, the axiom ‘existence exists’ satisfies both, because this recognition comes first both in our apprehension of reality (i.e., chronologically) as well as in the hierarchy of knowledge which we develop in our understanding of reality (i.e., logically). Since the axiom of existence satisfies a genuine \*conceptual\* need which we all have, there is no confusion here. Not on my part anyway. A philosophical starting point needs to identify the most fundamental of all truths, and this need requires it to be conceptually irreducible. As I pointed out in an earlier comment, the concept ‘existence’ is not defined in terms of prior concepts. If one supposes that it could be defined in terms of prior concepts, to what would those concepts refer, if not to things which exist? If they refer to things which exist, then clearly they assume the truth of the axiom of existence already, even if only implicitly, and make use of the concept they’re trying to define. That would lead to an infinite regress, which the axiom of existence avoids. If those concepts purported to define the concept ‘existence’ do not refer to things which exist, what good are they, and why would we have them in the first place? Blank out. A starting point also needs to identify a fact which is perceptually self-evident, for this is where our awareness of reality begins, with perception. It would not do to affirm a starting point which seeks to jump ahead of where our awareness begins, because this would treat a later recognition (or imagination) as being more fundamental than what we are first aware of. So both types of priority which your friend introduces are thus satisfied in one basic recognition, a recognition which would have to be true for anything else to be accepted as true.

The notion of ‘revelation’ is certainly not conceptually irreducible. The test for this is to ask whether or not it can be defined, and if so, how is it defined? One of my bible dictionaries does give this term a definition: “a term expressive of the fact that God has made known to men truths and realities that men could not discover for themselves.” Notice all the assumptions packed into this one idea. It is clearly not fundamental, for it stands on a whole host of prior assumptions. It fails the conceptual irreducibility test. Also, given this definition (and I’ve seen others which essentially say the same thing), it clearly cannot pass the perceptually self-evident test, for it stipulates by definition that whatever “truths and realities” are known through revelation are “truths and realities that men could not discover for themselves,” while perception gives man direct awareness of objects which exist.

Notice also that your friend realizes that “revelational foundationalism works backward.” It has no choice but to do this, because it begins with a large assortment of assumptions, bundles them into an enormous package-deal, and accepts that package-deal as a non-negotiable, and then “works backward” from there in order “to find justification for them.” The purpose of identifying one’s starting point is to cut past assumptions which we take for granted so that we can understand what is truly fundamental and determine whether or not those assumptions are in fact rationally grounded. A “revelational foundationalism” has its priorities completely reversed, since it does not want to concede any assumptions, but rather wants to hang onto them and find ways of justifying them. This is why it is so fruitful, from an atheological standpoint, to ask a theist to name its starting point. Whatever he offers is most likely going to fail the fundamentality tests. See also these essays: [TAG and the Fallacy of the Stolen Concept](#) and [Is the Assumption of the Christian God Axiomatic?](#). Also, the notion of ‘revelation’ defies the very concept of objectivity, since the appeal to revelation is used in cases where purported “knowledge” has no actual tie to reality. The above definition for ‘revelation’ given in my bible dictionary confirms this. It is the attempt to accept as knowledge ideational content which has not been epistemologically earned, and is thus another expression of the theist’s desire for the unearned. It is because theistic assertions are in fact objectively baseless, that theists need to resort to appeals to revelation in order to safeguard them. Of course, any set of arbitrary claims could be “justified” by appealing to an invisible magic being which allegedly “revealed” them to a privileged clique of mystics.

Regards,  
Dawson

[September 29, 2008 9:12 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson: *I can understand why your friend wants to remain anonymous.*

Ahh the usual twisting of any information to your advantage; I've come to expect this from you. He didn't ask to remain anonymous I just didn't want to bring him into the discussion without his permission.

Yesterday Bnonn posted the full article in response to your claims about the founding worldview proposition of Christianity:

<http://bnonn.thinkingmatters.org.nz/2008/the-chronological-priority-objection-revisited/>

[September 29, 2008 11:08 AM](#)

[breakerslion](#) said...

*"David wrote:*

*Are all these ancient historians spewing legend material uncritically?*

*Dawson: I certainly would not advocate accepting the New Testament's stories at face value*

*I was talking about the external sources in that statement."*

Oy. Just Oy. I have to stop right there. I finally finished your long but captivating rebuttal, (re-rebuttal?) and I hit this germ, uh, gem in the comments. Talking about the "external sources" in this way and excluding the "inspired" material in the Bible amounts to special pleading, does it not? I lack the stamina to go on. My hat is once again off to you.

[November 19, 2008 6:41 PM](#)

[breakerslion](#) said...

Having once read, *Too Far to Walk*, I actually did go through the comments. Here's my take on one.

### **The Cosmicological Argument**

1. Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence, either in the necessity of its own nature or in an external cause because I say so.
2. If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God 'cause I'm too lazy to look for anything but a magic kluge.
3. The universe exists.
4. Therefore, the explanation of the universe's existence is God and that's not circular to false premise number two 'cause I say so.

### **The Kablam Cosmological Argument**

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist. I know, 'cause I was there.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause, and that cause was a giant mouse snorting up all this stuff. You can't prove otherwise.

### **The Totallyillogical Argument**

1. The fine-tuning of the universe is due either to physical necessity, chance, or design.
2. It is not due to physical necessity or chance because I say so.
3. Therefore, it is due to design., and since 99.9 repeating percent of the universe is fine-tuned to kill you, The Designer is an idiot or an asshole.

## The Moron Argument

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist 'cause us humans are just too dumb to think this up.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists 'cause we need a super being to tell us it's wrong to fuck each other over.

## The Omnibustical Argument

1. It is possible that a maximally great being (God) exists, and that he's inordinately fascinated with humans and he has this giant blue dog and it smells like bubble gum and talks.
2. If it is possible that a maximally great being exists, then a maximally great being exists in some possible world because everyone knows imagination is real.
3. If a maximally great being exists in some possible world, then it exists in every possible world because crayons grow on trees for much the same reason.
4. If a maximally great being exists in every possible world, then it exists in the actual world because I have a really really really really really thin grasp on reality.
5. Therefore, a maximally great being exists in the actual world and Tinkerbell got well when I clapped my hands.
6. Therefore, a maximally great being exists 'cause if I keep saying that, it's true.
7. Therefore, God exists 'cause I believe bronze-age goat fuckers had the total handle on this.

## The Transcendental Argument

I deny your reality and substitute my own.

Alvina Plantinga has recently written an article called [Naturalism Defeated\(pdf\)](#)

Plantinga has written a lot of stuff.

Not very helpful perhaps, but if you don't laugh, you cry.

[November 19, 2008 7:50 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hey Breakerslion,

Those arguments are rather spot on, I'd say. Thanks for sharing!

Yes, you never know just how juicy a quote you'll get when you dialogue with someone who ascribes to the cartoon universe premise.

As for apparently preferring "external sources" to validate the contents of "inspired scripture": yes, that does seem an odd move to make. I remember back in the days of my misguided youth when I was conned into the church doors. My teachers put all emphasis on "scripture" and never even brought up "external sources." The bible was sufficient to stand alone in their view, and they took their religious beliefs extremely seriously.

I was thinking the other day about the claim that it takes a generation or longer for a legend to develop. I know of many counter-examples of this. Back in 2002 a close friend of my wife's committed suicide over a broken heart (she hung herself in her dorm bathroom). This took place in the old country (my wife is from SE Asia), where events like this generate a lot of hysteria. Another friend of my wife's recently stayed with us for a few weeks, and one day the name of this young girl who took her life came up in conversation. My wife's friend related how many of their mutual friends are still frightened by "appearances" of this now deceased friend of theirs, not only in dreams, but in waking life. She has been seen at 7/11, at a hospital (where lots of ghosts and other spooks hangout), at a shopping mall, on a motorcycle taxi, in a college classroom, etc. Stories of these "sightings" have been circulating among this group of mutual friends, and others, for several years now. And apparently some really believe she really is haunting places, and they're quite scared. But they continue to occur, even to this day. So I'm told.

Now, this young woman took her life just over 6 years ago (I believe it was in Aug. 2002 if I'm not mistaken,



because I had traveled overseas just a couple months after this). 6 years is hardly a generation, and I remember the stories cropping up just a week or so after this girl took her life. In some cultures, legends catch on like wildfire; once they start, they take root very quickly and tend to spread widely, and even spawn similar legends. At this point it's still all oral - they talk about it, but I doubt anyone has sat down to write a narrative of these events (though I'm already doing it, only 6 years later!!!). Maybe mine is not the first "account" of this.

My wife has told me many other fantastic stories like this that she's picked up over the years, as they're a dime a dozen. Some are older than others. Some may be older than a generation at this point. Some may be much younger. But here's one that I know began just 6 years ago, and I've heard various stories about this young girl many times now.

So when I hear a Christian apologist claiming that it takes a generation or more for a legend to develop and work its way into a culture, I know for a fact we're being fed another line of bullshit. It's simply not true, and I certainly know better.

Regards,  
Dawson

[November 19, 2008 8:25 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Oh, by the way, Breakerslion, before I forget...

In David's last comment above (29 Sept.), he provided a link to a post by Dominic Tennant, who attempted defend "theistic foundationalism" against the axioms by way of interaction with some of my own comments.

I have since authored my own reply to Tennant here: [A Reply to Tennant on Theistic Foundationalism vs. the Objectivist Axioms](#).

I have not seen a response to this.

Regards,  
Dawson

[November 19, 2008 8:33 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

This post has been removed by the author.

[November 19, 2008 11:31 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

This post has been removed by the author.

[November 19, 2008 11:33 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Breakerslion,

My hat goes off to you as well, since apparently you missed the entire point of the reference to ancient historians in non-Biblical literature.

[November 19, 2008 11:49 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson,

Somehow you keep convincing yourself that its ok to assume first century Palestine is comparable to our historical context.

*I know of many counter-examples of this.*

And are any of them situated in the appropriate historical context? Nope. Gerd Ludeman the atheist historian did most of the work on studying the chronology of legends.

So when you hear a Christian apologist claim something remember they already told you otherwise, but you conveniently forgot so you could throw a few insults around. Have fun with that, you has lost my respect as a serious thinker.

*As for apparently preferring “external sources” to validate the contents of “inspired scripture”: yes, that does seem an odd move to make*

Not an odd move if you've ever studied historiography. Its pretty standard actually.

[November 19, 2008 11:54 PM](#)

[breakerslion](#) said...

David,

Here's the thing: I consider those arguments an insult to my intelligence and so fair game. To me, they represent the same kind of semantic legerdemain that apologists are famous for. They are full of holes. I prefer to throw banana peels through those holes because I'm old and tired, and I've stopped trying to fight illogic with logic. It's very time consuming, often futile, and not nearly as much fun.

If I misunderstood what you had to say about the meagre and questionable external sources, I apologize. The discussion you were having and I was reading got quite convoluted. As Dawson points out, superstitious people do tend to repeat things uncritically if those things conform to their prejudices. Check out the "Blessed Virgin" scene in Fellini's "La Dolce Vita" if you think anything has changed.

[November 20, 2008 4:18 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "Somehow you keep convincing yourself that its ok to assume first century Palestine is comparable to our historical context."

I see. No argument here, but I'm just wrong anyway, is that it? "Legends developed in ancient Egypt; they developed in ancient Greece; they developed in ancient Rome, they developed among the Goths, the Vikings, the Persians, the Sumerians, they even develop today in some cultures. But don't dare think legends ever developed in first century Palestine!" Do I have that right?

I wrote: *I know of many counter-examples of this.*

David: "And are any of them situated in the appropriate historical context? Nope."

How would you know this, David? Please, tell me, how would you know?

As for "situated in the appropriate historical context," can you help me find this in the following?

*...he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time...*

Meanwhile, the story I told you had a definite inception date back in August of 2002. I can ask for the specific date if you want; my wife could probably get this, and if you wanted to go official there would be records of the young girl's suicide (though you'd need to learn an Asiatic language to read it). That would establish a historical

date. And unlike Paul's testimony in I Corinthians, I could get contact information for the "witnesses" of this girl's post-suicide appearances; most are in their mid to later 20's now I'd say. They could give you the details you're asking for. Etc.

David: "Gerd Ludeman the atheist historian did most of the work on studying the chronology of legends."

So what? Christian apologists often repeat the claim that it takes more than a generation for a legend to develop, which I know is patently false, and they almost never (you seem to be one exception) cite Ludemann, as if he were infallible on the subject. Do you believe everything else Ludemann says? Regardless, if anyone, Ludemann included, says that a legend *\*cannot\** develop in less than a generation, I'd say he must have been very selective in his samplings.

David: "So when you hear a Christian apologist claim something remember they already told you otherwise,"

This is unclear. Who's "they" here, and what was told to me "otherwise"?

David: "but you conveniently forgot so you could throw a few insults around."

I "conveniently forgot" what? And what insults did I "throw around"? I simply pointed out a counter-example to the claim that it takes at least a generation for a legend to develop. I could consult my wife and others from her homeland for plenty more. Have you traveled much in this great big world, David? It's an amazing place. You'd be surprised what you find out there.

David: "Have fun with that, you has lost my respect as a serious thinker."

David, did I ever earn your respect in the first place? How long are you going to continue trying to earn mine?

I wrote: *As for apparently preferring "external sources" to validate the contents of "inspired scripture": yes, that does seem an odd move to make*

David: "Not an odd move if you've ever studied historiography. Its pretty standard actually."

It's not an odd move for a secular-minded historian, sure. But the context of my comment clearly ruled this out (remember the part about the belief that the bible could stand on its own?). Did you not see that?

David, can I ask you a serious question? Why are you so thick-headed sometimes? I just want to know why. Do you pride yourself on slamming your head against a brick wall or something? Really, sometimes I'm sad for you.

Regards,  
Dawson

[November 20, 2008 5:39 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Breakerslion,

I think psychology demonstrates that everyone has the tendency to accept things uncritically which conform to their biases. Its one of the reasons a worldview can be so powerful in framing reality as we experience it.

If you think superstitious people are more vulnerable to this, I would just remind you of what Dawson believes. Anyone who isn't an Objectivist is prone to fall prey to myth and superstition. Look back through the threads of our debate, and you will see the comment.

So your garden variety naturalist is in the same boat by Dawson's standards. For this reason, most atheists (for instance over at Debunking Christianity) consider Objectivism to be more fundamentalist and cultic than Christianity.

[November 20, 2008 8:17 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

*I see. No argument here, but I'm just wrong anyway, is that it? "Legends developed in ancient Egypt; they developed in ancient Greece; they developed in ancient Rome, they developed among the Goths, the Vikings, the Persians, the Sumerians, they even develop today in some cultures. But don't dare think legends ever developed in first century Palestine!" Do I have that right?*

Completely missed the point. You were arguing from your own experience about how legends develop. I am saying that your example fails to account for all the significant factors that differentiate your experience from a person in first century Palestine. Of course legends developed there, but you can't assume that they did so the same way you have experienced in your lifetime.

*How would you know this, David? Please, tell me, how would you know?*

How much epistemic warrant must one have to know that the experiences you described did not happen in first century Palestine?

*Meanwhile, the story I told you had a definite inception date back in August of 2002.*

Precisely my point.

*So what? Christian apologists often repeat the claim that it takes more than a generation for a legend to develop, which I know is patently false, and they almost never (you seem to be one exception) cite Ludemann, as if he were infallible on the subject. Do you believe everything else Ludemann says? Regardless, if anyone, Ludemann included, says that a legend \*cannot\* develop in less than a generation, I'd say he must have been very selective in his samplings.*

This is where you really shine as an Objectivist apologist. Your claim was that "Christian apologists say this" so I merely pointed out that Ludemann worked in this area extensively. Then you try to turn my claim into an deferral to some authority on the matter. You are so busy trying to argue with every point that you miss the forest.

Ludemann's samplings are appropriately placed in the historical context of first century Palestine. So that would be his selection criteria.

*This is unclear. Who's "they" here, and what was told to me "otherwise"?*

Sorry let me clarify. I already told you earlier in our interactions that Ludemann was a big inspiration for this legend timeline. My point was you were ignoring this when you tried to present my claims as just "another line of bullshit" that Christian apologists throw out.

*David, did I ever earn your respect in the first place? How long are you going to continue trying to earn mine?*

Yes you did earn my respect, and have not completely lost it. Dawson, you have shown that you can have no respect for Christians, so I wouldn't even dream of trying to earn it. Its just another line of bullshit from a cartoon universe myth maker ;)

*It's not an odd move for a secular-minded historian, sure. But the context of my comment clearly ruled this out (remember the part about the belief that the bible could stand on its own?). Did you not see that?*

You're doing that thing again where you import your position as a standard which I must follow.

*David, can I ask you a serious question? Why are you so thick-headed sometimes? I just want to know why. Do you pride yourself on slamming your head against a brick wall or something? Really, sometimes I'm sad for you.*

Its not clear what you mean here. If you're the brick wall, then surely you realize that your statement merely makes us both hard-headed, which I'll gladly grant. :-)

[November 20, 2008 8:39 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "For this reason, most atheists (for instance over at Debunking Christianity) consider Objectivism to be

more fundamentalist and cultic than Christianity.”

And of course, everything an atheist over at Debunking Christianity says in the comments sections of blogs is true, right? And of course, truth is decided by majority vote, right? I don't think either implication here is true, and I doubt you do either. While I have not performed any surveys or crunched the numbers (I'm guessing you have?), but I would not at all be surprised if the vast majority of non-believers were neither Objectivists nor friendly to Objectivist principles. After all, many atheists - as Van Til and his followers have told us time and again - are simply borrowing from the Christian worldview, so their rejection of rational philosophy comes as no surprise. There is a vast assortment of subjective viewpoints out there, and rejecting one subjective viewpoint does not necessarily entail embracing an objective viewpoint. I would expect you would understand this, David.

I'm supposing you're referencing [this blog](#) and its comments, in which you asked “to hear some DC opinions on objectivism.” Yes, I've seen the responses there, and they are pretty much what I would expect in a comments section. Notice there is virtually no substance to the railings you find there, just unsubstantiated charges of “fundamentalism” and the like. The fact that there are people who hate Objectivism is nothing new, David. The fact that a sizeable proportion of Objectivism's detractors are ill-informed about what it teaches, that they get their understanding (if any) of Objectivism from secondhand or thirdhand sources, is no revelation.

I thought Lucy's comment about the reaction to an opinion posted in the comments section of [one of my blog entries](#) being “met with much hostility” was rather humorous. What did Lucy consider “hostile” about the few replies (one being mine) posted in response to the heckler who visited my blog? She does not say.

Regardless, David, if you want to find people who abhor Objectivism, you'll find many.

David: “I am saying that your example fails to account for all the significant factors that differentiate your experience from a person in first century Palestine.”

Let's see: a person dies, and within a matter of days people who knew that person begin reporting that they've seen this person alive, walking around, interacting with other people, speaking, etc. They recognize the person they see as the person who died, are frightened by these appearances, believe they are real, believe the person who died now lives again in some way, and can come back any time. Am I talking about Jesus? Or am I talking about the girl who committed suicide in August 2002? Or, am I talking about both? The essential parallels are there. Sure, you could list factors which differentiate these stories, e.g., the individuals involved are speakers of different languages, they live in different parts of the earth, have different customs, wear different styles of clothing, live in different centuries, etc. But the relevant parallels are clearly there. Perhaps you want to suppress these parallels so as to make your Jesus legend unique. Maybe that will work in your mind. After all, you're just trying to conform what I've related to your biases, right? After all, isn't that what you told Breakerslion?

Regards,  
Dawson

[November 20, 2008 8:02 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

*And of course, everything an atheist over at Debunking Christianity says in the comments sections of blogs is true, right? And of course, truth is decided by majority vote, right? I don't think either implication here is true, and I doubt you do either.*

Why are you so wasteful with words? Of course I don't think that nor did my statement imply any such thing.

*There is a vast assortment of subjective viewpoints out there, and rejecting one subjective viewpoint does not necessarily entail embracing an objective viewpoint. I would expect you would understand this, David.*

I never stated that those atheists were objective because they rejected Christianity. I would expect you would not state the obvious and then act as if I don't understand it. Your tactics are endless! :-)

*I'm supposing you're referencing this blog and its comments, in which you asked “to hear some DC opinions on objectivism.” Yes, I've seen the responses there, and they are pretty much what I would expect in a comments section. Notice there is virtually no substance to the railings you find there, just unsubstantiated charges of “fundamentalism” and the like. The fact that there are people who hate Objectivism is nothing new, David. The*

*fact that a sizeable proportion of Objectivism's detractors are ill-informed about what it teaches, that they get their understanding (if any) of Objectivism from secondhand or thirdhand sources, is no revelation.*

Why would an atheist hate objectivism?

*Maybe that will work in your mind. After all, you're just trying to conform what I've related to your biases, right? After all, isn't that what you told Breakerslion?*

Having a tendency to do something (t) in a situation (s) does not entail necessarily that "if S, then t."

I would expect you to understand that.

Sigh, I guess I'll finish off this silly historical parallel that you insist is relevant:

When Ludemann or other historians talk about time constraints on legend development, they are not deeming the contrary impossible. In addition, the arguments to not seek to establish a general timeline for legend development for all historical eras. How asinine would that be?

Apparently oblivious to this, you press on. Your counterexample can do nothing but show what is possible. But a possibility counterexample does nothing against an argument for what is probable.

Consider this:

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David: Hey Dawson you really shouldn't smoke twenty packs a day because its probable that you'll get cancer.

Dawson: Thats rubbish, my grandfather smokes twenty packs a day and he lived to be 103.

-----

Do you see the problem with that example? Then you should see the problem with your argument.

And notice I'm granting you that the historical context isn't relevant, which of course it is (if you understand that their arguments have a particular historical context in mind which is part of the conclusion you seek to refute).

Just in case you need more clarification, here's an example:

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Historian: In the ancient world, legends probably would have developed at x rate.

Dawson: Rubbish, I can provide evidence of a legend that developed at y rate in 2002!

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The only way your counterexample works is if the historian was trying to argue that "no legend could possibly **ever** develop at any rate faster than x."

Sheesh.

[November 21, 2008 1:02 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I had written: *I know of many counter-examples of this.*

David asked: "And are any of them situated in the appropriate historical context? Nope."

I responded: *How would you know this, David? Please, tell me, how would you know?*

David replied: "How much epistemic warrant must one have to know that the experiences you described did not happen in first century Palestine?"

What makes first century Palestine so unique? When you asked about "appropriate historical context," did you mean to ask whether the counter-examples I have in mind were taken from first century Palestine? That surely

wasn't clear to me; "appropriate historical context" could mean lots of things. It does not indicate a specific locale within a specific century.

I wrote: *Meanwhile, the story I told you had a definite inception date back in August of 2002.*

David: "Precisely my point."

I guess your point is still not clear. My point was that the legend of the girl's post-suicide "appearances" has a specific starting point in time, and that that time is recent (just over six years ago), and that its participants knew the girl when she was alive and have reported seeing her after her death, within only a few days of her dying.

David: "Ludemann's samplings are appropriately placed in the historical context of first century Palestine. So that would be his selection criteria."

What exactly was his conclusion? Do you have it in his own words? If he conducted experiments, what was his control, and what was his experimental data? What conclusion did he draw from it, and how did he arrive at it? I can't find this in any of the Christian apologetic literature, and yet you seem to be saying that Christian apologists who claim that legends cannot develop within a generation or so "after the fact" are taking their cue from Ludemann.

I wrote: *And of course, everything an atheist over at Debunking Christianity says in the comments sections of blogs is true, right? And of course, truth is decided by majority vote, right? I don't think either implication here is true, and I doubt you do either.*

David: "Why are you so wasteful with words?"

I don't think I'm "wasteful with words," David. I see that my point got through to you, so I'm quite confident that my words have not been a waste.

David: "Of course I don't think that nor did my statement imply any such thing."

David, what was your purpose, if you don't mind me asking, in asking for opinions about Objectivism at DC? Were you looking specifically for atheists to give their opinion? Are you having trouble forming your own?

I wrote: *There is a vast assortment of subjective viewpoints out there, and rejecting one subjective viewpoint does not necessarily entail embracing an objective viewpoint. I would expect you would understand this, David.*

David: "I never stated that those atheists were objective because they rejected Christianity."

I know. I wouldn't expect you to make such a statement.

David: "I would expect you would not state the obvious and then act as if I don't understand it."

Sometimes I find it necessary to state the obvious.

David: "Your tactics are endless! :-)"

I know. Awful, isn't it? It's what makes me so lovable and keeps you coming back for more and more. :-)

David: "Why would an atheist hate objectivism?"

I cannot answer for what others love or hate, David. I would expect it to vary from individual to individual. Perhaps the atheist in question thinks principles are too confining. Perhaps he doesn't like Ayn Rand's hairdo. Perhaps he didn't like her novels. Maybe he doesn't like her accent. Maybe he met someone who associated himself with Objectivism and didn't like his/her personality. It could be all kinds of reasons. It's not up to me.

I wrote: *Maybe that will work in your mind. After all, you're just trying to conform what I've related to your biases, right? After all, isn't that what you told Breakerslion?*

David: "Having a tendency to do something (t) in a situation (s) does not entail necessarily that 'if S, then t'."



So, are you, or are you not, as you intimated to Breakerslion, being guided by your biases?

David: "When Ludemann or other historians talk about time constraints on legend development, they are not deeming the contrary impossible."

Oh, that's good to know. Because the story I related to you about the young girl who committed suicide and appearing to people afterwards... I'm inclined to suppose this is legendary rather than factual. And it certainly has happened within the same generation in which she died. (See below for some more juicy details.)

David: "In addition, the arguments to not seek to establish a general timeline for legend development for all historical eras. How asinine would that be?"

Quite asinine indeed! Who would ever claim that the development of legends must conform to some pre-set timeline? (I have an idea who might...)

David: "Apparently oblivious to this, you press on."

Yeah, I'm one really dense dude, aren't I?

David: "Your counterexample can do nothing but show what is possible."

Well, you seem to be assuming it's a legend. But according to what I've read, a legend *cannot* develop within one generation. That's what numerous Christian apologists have assured me is the case. See below.

David: "But a possibility counterexample does nothing against an argument for what is probable."

Does supposing that it's "probable" that a legend will take a generation or more to develop, entail that it is *improbable* that a legend will develop in less time? I'm just being curious here.

David: "Consider this:

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*David: Hey Dawson you really shouldn't smoke twenty packs a day because its probable that you'll get cancer.*

*Dawson: Thats rubbish, my grandfather smokes twenty packs a day and he lived to be 103.*

-----"

The real Dawson says: I don't smoke. I quit in 1986. And even then, I smoked only two packs per day. Haven't had one since, and have no desire for one. Whipped it by my own will power, too. No invisible magic beings can take credit for my victory over tobacco.

David: "Do you see the problem with that example? Then you should see the problem with your argument."

What exactly do you think my argument has been, David?

David: "And notice I'm granting you that the historical context isn't relevant, which of course it is"

Can you be more specific here? Where did I say that "historical context isn't relevant"?

David: "(if you understand that their arguments have a particular historical context in mind which is part of the conclusion you seek to refute)."

Bear with me, I guess I'm just slow. Can you be more explicit here? What are you trying to say?

David: "Just in case you need more clarification, here's an example:

-----

*Historian: In the ancient world, legends probably would have developed at x rate.*

*Dawson: Rubbish, I can provide evidence of a legend that developed at y rate in 2002!*

-----"

Well, typically, it's not \*historians\* telling me that legends will not develop within a generation, and those who do tell me this never qualify their stipulations about the time it takes for a legend to develop with degrees of probability (nor do they mention Gerd Ludemann). Here are some examples:

"Is the resurrection legendary? The time frame is too short for a legend to develop, especially during the lifetimes of people who claimed to be eyewitnesses." (John Frame, "Presuppositional Apologetics," *Five Views on Apologetics*, p. 230)

No suggestion here of the time it takes for a legend to develop being a matter of \*probability\*. Also no reference to Ludemann's work.

Here's another:

"...there was not enough time for myth to develop.... several generations have to pass before the added mythological elements can be mistakenly believed to be facts." (Kreeft & Tracelli, *Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, pp. 76-77)

Same thing: No mention of Ludemann's work on this matter, and no hint of it being a matter of probability.

[Another source](#) cites someone other than Ludemann for this view of legendary development: "No first century date allows time for myths or legends to creep into the stories about Jesus. Legend development takes at least two full generations, according to A.N. Sherwin-White (see Sherwin-White, 189)."

And notice there's no suggestion of it being a matter of probability. Everyone seems very certain that a legend could not develop earlier than a generation, or even two!

Apologist Phil Fernandes, in his [New Testament Reliability](#), cites of all people Josh McDowell when he writes, "Historians recognize that legends take centuries to develop." No Ludemann here. No mention of probability, either. And now it's "centuries," not just a couple decades.

And of course, there are our old friends Geisler and Turek. They too do not cite Ludemann for their view about the time it takes for a legend to develop; instead, they cite William Lane Craig: "The tests show that even two generations is too short to allow legendary tendencies to wipe out the hard core of historical fact." (Craig, *The Son Rises*, p. 101; quoted in *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, pp. 244-245.)

David: "The only way your counterexample works is if the historian was trying to argue that 'no legend could possibly ever develop at any rate faster than x'."

For one thing, David, the story I related to you is true: there are people I know of who truly believe that a friend of theirs died and has been seen again after her death within their lifetimes. It succeeds in showing that a fantastic story (call it a legend, a myth, a lie, a mass hallucination, a strong delusion, or what have you) can develop very quickly in response to dreadful news. It "works" whether you or anyone else likes it, because it happens. Anyone who says that a legend cannot develop in less than just a few days or months, is obviously bested by actual occurrences.

Now after I had posted my last comment yesterday evening, I was talking to my wife about her friend who committed suicide. I was right about the approximate time frame - it was in August 2002. The girl's name was Bo. She was among my wife's high school friends, a group of forty or fifty who stayed in touch and remained close friends after high school. Bo was heartbroken over a spurned relationship, and the despair drove her to hang herself in her college dorm. Now my wife reminded me of a part of the story which I had forgotten, but is quite dramatic, if it is to be believed. On the night that Bo hanged herself, another friend in this group, a boy named Tee, had a dream about Bo. No one knew that Bo had hanged herself, because this was not discovered until the next morning. That night, Tee had a dream in which he was standing on the street and a bus pulled up and stopped in front of him. The doors of the bus opened and Bo was the driver of the bus. Bo asked Tee if he wanted to climb aboard the bus, because she wanted to take him with her. Tee thought nothing of the dream until the next day when he heard about Bo having hanged herself. Then he was freaked out, believing that she had visited him in his dreams shortly after she hanged herself.

Bo's closest friend, Amm, was deeply moved by Bo's suicide, as you can imagine. Amm has reported not only numerous dreams about Bo, but also sightings of Bo in her daily activities. Within a week, Amm had seen Bo at a

hair salon in a popular mall, on a bus (which really freaked her out after she heard about Tee's dream), at a fish market, in school (Amm was a university student at the time), at a jewelry shop, and other locales. Several other close friends have also reported "sightings" or "appearances" of Bo.

Now what's notable is none of these individuals \*expected\* to see Bo, or expected her to "appear" after her death. They weren't even hoping for it, for in their culture, no one hopes to see a ghost (or whatever it is that Bo has become since her death). So according to Gary Habermas, these stories could not be hallucinations. Habermas assures us that "hallucinations are rooted in the preconditions of one's hopeful expectations, but the disciples despaired at the death of Jesus and did not expect him to rise" ("Evidential Apologetics," *Five Views On Apologetics*, p. 114). Similarly, Bo's friends did not expect her to "rise" or "appear" after her suicide. Indeed, they did not even expect her to commit suicide! And I strongly doubt that, unlike Jesus, she had told them that she would come back after she died.

So David, it seems that, if you believe the story of Jesus being resurrected, you should be inclined to believe the story about Bo and her post-suicide appearances. But I'm supposing you don't, and that is hard for me to understand.

Regards,  
Dawson

[November 21, 2008 9:45 PM](#)

[breakerslion](#) said...

Hi again. I'd like to make a few observations and then I'll leave you two alone. This is a very interesting conversation/debate, but it does seem to have as many tributaries as the Amazon, and is getting as diffuse as most of the good Theist/Atheist arguments I have read.

"Is the resurrection legendary? The time frame is too short for a legend to develop, especially during the lifetimes of people who claimed to be eyewitnesses." (John Frame, "Presuppositional Apologetics," *Five Views on Apologetics*, p. 230)

"Apologet Phil Fernandes, in his *New Testament Reliability*, cites of all people Josh McDowell when he writes, "Historians recognize that legends take centuries to develop." No Ludemann here. No mention of probability, either. And now it's "centuries," not just a couple decades."

First, let's suppose that it does take two generations or so to ferment a legend. The formula supposes that the legend is growing organically, not getting help from some self-interested party who is selling it like cheap jewelry on the Home Shopping Channel. Paul fully understood the money-making power of the religious scam, and was busy trying to create his own hierarchy and cut his own flock of sheep out of the herds of his neighbors. For insight into how long this process takes in a scientifically challenged society, I give you two words: John From. In a technologically advanced society, look at Scientology.

The "legendary" growth of this assertion from a generation to "centuries" is predictable. Once you have successfully sold a lie, it's time to see how far you can stretch it.

I can't speak for other Atheists, at least not until I put it to a vote at the next meeting. Speaking only for myself, "hate" is too strong a word to define my feelings about Objectivism. I know enough about it to know that Ayn Rand is not the be-all and end-all by the way, any more than Freud is the last word in Psychiatry, or Darwin in Evolutionary Theory. I'm not an Objectivist for much the same reason that I'm not an Anarchist or a Communist. I think that the implementation of any of these philosophies, theoretical social constructs, or whatever you want to call them, fails to adequately account for the more criminal aspects of human nature. Among these aspects are the ease at which lazy thinkers can be manipulated. In other words, it looks good on paper.

My feelings toward religion do border on hatred. It has been used for millennia to control, manipulate, and divide the human race one against another. It has been used to legitimize despotic governments, and incite war and genocide. It has been used as a justification to enslave or discriminate against the racially and culturally different. It sells a message of hate disguised as love, and practices other brain-breaking mandated contradictions. The evidence that religion is the world's oldest scam is all through the Bible (and the Torah, and the Koran) like greasy fingerprints left behind on the pages. The religiously indoctrinated have simply been ordered not to see it (Faith: "Pay no attention to the turd behind the curtain!") or have been given overly elaborate and mealy-mouthed

excuses to explain these problems away. Arguments from Authority from the Priest-class whose authority rests on these same arguments and nothing more except a social willingness to cede that authority.

For me, it's simple. On one hand, we have the combined law libraries of every nation and society past or present telling us that it's not so simple to define right and wrong as "10 things not to do". On the other hand, we have the Bible. On one hand, we have all the publications in the fields of Psychology, Paleontology, Biology, Astrophysics, Physics, Chemistry, and Medicine. On the other hand, the uninformed assertions in the Bible that contradict our best understanding of these subjects. I don't particularly care how many people the religious "leaders" have conned. Their assertion that I have to believe misinformation or burn in Hell does not convince me that they know what they are talking about, believe their own lies, or that they don't know that it's all a racket.

[November 23, 2008 9:40 AM](#)

[Eliyahu](#) said...

How does breakerslion include the Torah with his disdaining of religion? Should we suppose that he can understand the Torah in Hebrew. There is after all very scientific evidence that it is a very old document, extant sources two thousand or more years old in the Qumran scrolls.

[November 23, 2008 6:00 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Ok this is the last lengthy response. Lets try to stay focused if possible.

*What makes first century Palestine so unique? When you asked about "appropriate historical context," did you mean to ask whether the counter-examples I have in mind were taken from first century Palestine? That surely wasn't clear to me; "appropriate historical context" could mean lots of things. It does not indicate a specific locale within a specific century.*

A simple definition of historical context is "the interrelated conditions in history in which something existed or occurred." The range of scope can obviously vary with each argument, which is exactly why a counterexample must be within the intended scope to counter the argument. So in other words if your example isn't in the scope of Ludemann's you can't counter with it. As to what makes first century Palestine unique (with regards to legend development), remember what we are comparing it with (our current time). There are a host of things today that could propogate a legend in less than a minute (television, internet, radio, cell phone). The oral traditions of the ancient world can't begin to offer such a thing. In your friend's example, could you guarantee that the story was only passed from mouth to mouth, in person, and not by use of any technology that would expedite the process?

*I guess your point is still not clear. My point was that the legend of the girl's post-suicide "appearances" has a specific starting point in time, and that that time is recent (just over six years ago), and that its participants knew the girl when she was alive and have reported seeing her after her death, within only a few days of her dying.*

All these things can be true and still not weigh against Ludemann's argument for the reasons I've given. Your point is certainly valid, but it is irrelevant to Ludemann's theory.

David: "Ludemann's samplings are appropriately placed in the historical context of first century Palestine. So that would be his selection criteria."

*What exactly was his conclusion? Do you have it in his own words? If he conducted experiments, what was his control, and what was his experimental data? What conclusion did he draw from it, and how did he arrive at it? I can't find this in any of the Christian apologetic literature, and yet you seem to be saying that Christian apologists who claim that legends cannot develop within a generation or so "after the fact" are taking their cue from Ludemann.*

I'll be brief so not to contribute to more of this blogorrhea. His works are published and available for your inspection should you wish to provide a substantive critique. I would enjoy reading your critique of an atheist historian. I'm just curious if Objectivism has any special constraints on historical argumentation and the kind of inductive arguments that one finds in that field of study? Seems that since historians make so many subjective judgements, a pure rationalist would disapprove.

I wrote: And of course, everything an atheist over at Debunking Christianity says in the comments sections of blogs is true, right? And of course, truth is decided by majority vote, right? I don't think either implication here is true, and I doubt you do either.

David: "Why are you so wasteful with words?"

*I don't think I'm "wasteful with words," David. I see that my point got through to you, so I'm quite confident that my words have not been a waste.*

The point was obvious. In general I would say your writings tend to be a bit excessive in length. If you could trim down the parts that aren't crucial to the argument, it may actually increase your reading audience. Some people just won't wade through 7 pages of word soup just to reconstruct the argument. That's why I often give a short notation of it, so that readers can quickly grasp it. Anyways, just a suggestion.

*David, what was your purpose, if you don't mind me asking, in asking for opinions about Objectivism at DC? Were you looking specifically for atheists to give their opinion? Are you having trouble forming your own?*

Having an opinion and surveying opinions are both allowed at the same time are they not? Really just curious what those folks had to say. I believe Robert B represented Objectivism over there for a short while. Not sure about anyone else.

*I know. I wouldn't expect you to make such a statement. Sometimes I find it necessary to state the obvious.*

Why would you say you would expect me to understand something unless you are implying that you think I don't understand it?

*So, are you, or are you not, as you intimated to Breakerslion, being guided by your biases?*

I'm not being guided by those biases since I'm aware of them in this situation.

David: "In addition, the arguments to not seek to establish a general timeline for legend development for all historical eras. How asinine would that be?"

*Quite asinine indeed! Who would ever claim that the development of legends must conform to some pre-set timeline? (I have an idea who might...)*

If you are implying that I would ever claim that, you have been misled. Exactly what brought you to that conclusion?

*Does supposing that it's "probable" that a legend will take a generation or more to develop, entail that it is improbable that a legend will develop in less time? I'm just being curious here.*

Depending on what you mean there are a couple of answers:

1. The  $p(x) + p(-x) = 1$ , i.e. probabilities add up to 1

Therefore, if the  $p(x) > .5$ , then the  $p(-x) < .5$

Therefore, if the probability of a legend developing in a generation or more is "probable", then necessarily it entails that the probability of a legend not developing in a generation or more is "not probable."

2. Let's say the generation was averaged at 40 years. This would be the mean (average) in a normal distribution. As one goes away a standard deviation from the mean, the probability decreases proportionately to the distance from the mean. So 30 years may still be probable depending on the standard deviation. 10 years may be what is considered to be a statistical outlier.

*The real Dawson says: I don't smoke. I quit in 1986. And even then, I smoked only two packs per day. Haven't had one since, and have no desire for one. Whipped it by my own will power, too. No invisible magic beings can take credit for my victory over tobacco.*

I smoked for a few years too and also quite by my own will power. However, you don't seem to have grasped the point of my little example. A probability assessment cannot be refuted by providing an instance of the contrary. Your original statement to breakerslioni indicated that your personal experience gave you the right to declare the Ludemann argument to be bullshit.

*Bear with me, I guess I'm just slow. Can you be more explicit here? What are you trying to say?*

I'm saying that if an argument's conclusion is "in x historical context, its probable that y" then you may not counter it with the argument "in z historical context, its the case that not y. Ludemann is specifically looking at the development of ancient myths.

Blomberg is pretty bold to state:

"But the most common skeptical alternative in recent years, that the resurrection stories are just late myths in which beliefs about Jesus' cause living on became embodied in mythological garb, simply doesn't have the decades (or sometimes centuries) needed for it to have developed the way all other ancient myths did."

<http://blog.bible.org/primetimejesus/content/resurrection-probably-reported-same-year-it-happened>

He has studied all the *known* ancient myths, so either he's lying or he has a point right?

*Well, typically, it's not \*historians\* telling me that legends will not develop within a generation, and those who do tell me this never qualify their stipulations about the time it takes for a legend to develop with degrees of probability (nor do they mention Gerd Ludemann).*

In general, the nitty gritty of scholarly argumentation is found in scholarly journals and dissertations, not popular books one can purchase at Barnes and Noble. The works you cited are introductory and summary style books.

*And of course, there are our old friends Geisler and Turek. They too do not cite Ludemann for their view about the time it takes for a legend to develop; instead, they cite William Lane Craig: "The tests show that even two generations is too short to allow legendary tendencies to wipe out the hard core of historical fact." (Craig, The Son Rises, p. 101; quoted in I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist, pp. 244-245.)*

Craig had two pretty good debates with Ludemann on the resurrection.  
<http://www.bringyou.to/apologetics/audio.htm>

David: "The only way your counterexample works is if the historian was trying to argue that 'no legend could possibly ever develop at any rate faster than x'."

*For one thing, David, the story I related to you is true: there are people I know of who truly believe that a friend of theirs died and has been seen again after her death within their lifetimes. It succeeds in showing that a fantastic story (call it a legend, a myth, a lie, a mass hallucination, a strong delusion, or what have you) can develop very quickly in response to dreadful news. It "works" whether you or anyone else likes it, because it happens. Anyone who says that a legend cannot develop in less than just a few days or months, is obviously bested by actual occurrences.*

You're missing the point. It doesn't matter if your story is true or not. You can't refute probability with a single instance. No one is saying that "a legend cannot develop in less than just a few days or months."

[November 24, 2008 12:19 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "So in other words if your example isn't in the scope of Ludemann's you can't counter with it."

If Ludemann's point is only one of probability, then I wouldn't *need* to counter it.

David: "As to what makes first century Palestine unique (with regards to legend development), remember what we are comparing it with (our current time). There are a host of things today that could propagate a legend in less than a minute (television, internet, radio, cell phone). The oral traditions of the ancient world can't begin to offer such a thing. In your friend's example, could you guarantee that the story was only passed from mouth to mouth, in person, and not by use of any technology that would expedite the process?"

I could not guarantee that cell phones were not used in relating the story about Bo's post-suicide appearances. I'm quite certain that television and radio played no role, though. Shortly after Bo's suicide, there was, as is customary, a wake at the temple and a cremation of the body. Many of her close friends and family would have attended this. Many of these friends were students at the time and would have seen each other probably on a daily basis for months to come. My wife, who was still going to school there at the time, learned about it from Amm, one of Bo's closest friends. They had a class together and saw each other almost every day. There was ample opportunity for the story to spread face to face.

I wrote: *I guess your point is still not clear. My point was that the legend of the girl's post-suicide "appearances" has a specific starting point in time, and that that time is recent (just over six years ago), and that its participants knew the girl when she was alive and have reported seeing her after her death, within only a few days of her dying.*

David: "Your point is certainly valid, but it is irrelevant to Ludemann's theory."

Since, as you have indicated, Ludemann's theory is one of probability, your statement here seems a little too eager. The story I have related would confirm that *at best* Ludemann's conclusion could only be probable. At any rate, how about the claim, which I have seen from many Christians (I gave examples in my last comment), that a legend *cannot* develop in less than a generation, a claim that is never tempered by concessions to probability? Going by what Christians have told me, the story about Bo's post-suicide appearances could not be legendary (they apparently must be all true), since they developed so quickly after her death and circulated immediately among people who were directly familiar with her when she was alive. Of course, it seems like a legend to me.

David: "I'll be brief so not to contribute to more of this blogorrhea. His works are published and available for your inspection should you wish to provide a substantive critique."

Well, you've contributed quite a bit of blogorrhea already, David. In fact, you're the one who brought up Ludemann's theory in the first place. When asked for his conclusion in his own words and for a synopsis of how he drew that conclusion, you seem to be pooping out. What gives here?

David: "I'm just curious if Objectivism has any special constraints on historical argumentation and the kind of inductive arguments that one finds in that field of study?"

Sure, beginning with the primacy of existence principle of course, and the objective theory of concepts. Essentially, reliance on reason.

David: "Seems that since historians make so many subjective judgements, a pure rationalist would disapprove."

I couldn't speak for "a pure rationalist." (Hint: Objectivism is *not* rationalism.)

David: "In general I would say your writings tend to be a bit excessive in length."

I have no problem with this complaint. Would you also say this about NT Wright, Greg Bahnsen, Cornelius Van Til, et al.?

David: "If you could trim down the parts that aren't crucial to the argument, it may actually increase your reading audience."

Increasing my reading audience is not my primary goal, David. If it were, I might choose to write about play time at the beach or something more pedestrian than what I have chosen to write about.

David: "Some people just won't wade through 7 pages of word soup just to reconstruct the argument."

Water always finds its own level. Besides, 7 pages? Which of my blogs is only 7 pages? I shoot for a minimum of 15! ;)

I asked: *David, what was your purpose, if you don't mind me asking, in asking for opinions about Objectivism at DC? Were you looking specifically for atheists to give their opinion? Are you having trouble forming your own?*

David: "Having and opinion and surveying opinions are both allowed at the same time are they not?"



Of course.

David: “Really just curious what those folks had to say.”

I figured this much. Why would you be curious what they have to say?

David: “I believe Robert B represented Objectivism over there for a short while. Not sure about anyone else.”

You know, I was invited several times (some time ago now) to join DC. I’ve been invited to join other blogs as well. I’ve always been too selfish to do the group thing. (You know, we Objectivists are all about being part of a cult, right? ;)

I asked: *So, are you, or are you not, as you intimated to Breakerslion, being guided by your biases?*

David: “I’m not being guided by those biases since I’m aware of them in this situation.”

Ah, okay. So, if one says he’s aware of his biases, then he can claim that he’s not being guided by them. Got it.

I wrote: *Who would ever claim that the development of legends must conform to some pre-set timeline? (I have an idea who might...)*

David: “If you are implying that I would ever claim that, you have been misled.”

I wasn’t implying anything about you, David. I had given direct quotes as examples of what I’m talking about. They weren’t from your hand.

David: “Therefore, if the probability of a legend developing in a generation or more is ‘probable’, then necessarily it entails that the probability of a legend not developing in a generation or more is ‘not probable’.”

Does the improbable ever happen?

David: “However, you don’t seem to have grasped the point of my little example. A probability assessment cannot be refuted by providing an instance of the contrary. Your original statement to breakerslion indicated that your personal experience gave you the right to declare the Ludemann argument to be bullshit.”

You seem to have missed mine, David. My comment about the claim that legends need a generation or more being bullshit was not a declaration regarding Ludemann’s probability argument (which I have yet to see laid out). Here’s what I wrote:

*So when I hear a Christian apologist claiming that it takes a generation or more for a legend to develop and work its way into a culture, I know for a fact we’re being fed another line of bullshit.*

I gave numerous examples of *Christians* making this claim, none of them referencing Ludemann and none of them tempering their pronouncements with latitudes of probability. I gave as a counter-example a story I have learned myself which clearly defies the “rule” which Christian apologists uncritically parrot in their defenses.

David: “I’m saying that if an argument’s conclusion is ‘in x historical context, its probable that y’ then you may not counter it with the argument ‘in z historical context, its the case that not y’.”

And as reasons for this you cited certain technological advances which “could propagate [sic] a legend in less than a minute (television, internet, radio, cell phone).” I think the counter-example I gave can easily serve as a contender, for there was ample opportunity for the story to spread mouth to mouth (it certainly did not go over the radio or television lines, and e-mail is not a common mode of communication in the culture in question, not yet anyway). As I pointed out, the group of friends regularly gathered, at school and other venues, where they could have shared their stories. The story about Bo’s post-suicide appearances had spread within just a couple weeks. The role of the technological advances you mentioned in the transmission of this story is either non-existent or minimal at best.

David: “Blomberg is pretty bold to state: ‘But the most common skeptical alternative in recent years, that the resurrection stories are just late myths in which beliefs about Jesus’ cause living on became embodied in

mythological garb, simply doesn't have the decades (or sometimes centuries) needed for it to have developed the way all other ancient myths did.'  
<http://blog.bible.org/primetimejesus/content/resurrection-probably-reported-same-year-it-happened> He has studied all the known ancient myths, so either he's lying or he has a point right?"

How does Blomberg know that in the case of Jesus' resurrection story, we don't "have the decades (or sometimes centuries) needed for it to have developed"? As I had pointed out in my blog, if the Jesus Paul was talking about had lived and died long before his own time (his own statements allow for this, as I have shown), then yes, we do see sufficient time here.

I wrote: *Well, typically, it's not \*historians\* telling me that legends will not develop within a generation, and those who do tell me this never qualify their stipulations about the time it takes for a legend to develop with degrees of probability (nor do they mention Gerd Ludemann).*

David: "The works you cited are introductory and summary style books."

So, since the sources I cited "are introductory and summary style books," it's okay for them to substitute the probable nature of a conclusion with pronouncements of certainty, and also to fail to mention Ludemann as the source of the argument whose conclusion they have bastardized?

Regardless, I find the claim that a legend *cannot* develop within less than say 20 or 40 years utterly incredible. But I can understand why apologists for a fictional position would find it expedient.

I wrote: *And of course, there are our old friends Geisler and Turek. They too do not cite Ludemann for their view about the time it takes for a legend to develop; instead, they cite William Lane Craig: "The tests show that even two generations is too short to allow legendary tendencies to wipe out the hard core of historical fact." (Craig, The Son Rises, p. 101; quoted in I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist, pp. 244-245.)*

David: "Craig had two pretty good debates with Ludemann on the resurrection.  
<http://www.bringyou.to/apologetics/audio.htm>"

So why don't Geisler and Turek cite Ludemann instead of Craig? Are they afraid to point their readers to a non-Christian source, or give the impression that Ludemann is some kind of authority (as you apparently think)?

David: "You're missing the point. It doesn't matter if your story is true or not. You can't refute probability with a single instance."

David, what gives you the idea that I am trying to "refute probability"? If Ludemann's conclusion is admitted only to be probable in nature, I don't need to refute it. Since the improbable can and often does happen, it's no worry to me.

David: "No one is saying that 'a legend cannot develop in less than just a few days or months'."

Well, yes, many have told me just this. But since you seem to recognize this to be an indefensible position, it's moot for my purposes. So long as you realize that a legend can crop up in a very short time, we're good.

Regards,  
Dawson

[November 24, 2008 6:03 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

*Well, typically, it's not \*historians\* telling me that legends will not develop within a generation, and those who do tell me this never qualify their stipulations about the time it takes for a legend to develop with degrees of probability (nor do they mention Gerd Ludemann).*

Historians make the arguments and popular works try to present them to the public. Historical arguments are almost always concluded with probable certainty about an event, but your point stands that these apologists should clarify exactly what they mean since the general public may not realize the inductive nature of historical work. So when you say "Everyone seems very certain that a legend could not develop earlier than a generation, or

even two!" it tells me that the general public may be thinking the same thing.

Personally, I follow the principle of charity when reconstructing an argument. That means I try to notate it in deductive form, and realize its rather ridiculous to say "its impossible for a legend to develop that way." In addition I realize that historical analysis rarely lends itself to 100% certainty about ancient events. So I reconstruct the argument with "probably" before the conclusion, and it is more likely to be sound. This is the essence of the principle of charity: assuming the best argument when multiple options avail. It reduces the risk of straw man, and also honors an opponent by potentially arguing against a better position than they intended!

*Well, you've contributed quite a bit of blogorrhea already, David. In fact, you're the one who brought up Ludemann's theory in the first place. When asked for his conclusion in his own words and for a synopsis of how he drew that conclusion, you seem to be pooping out. What gives here?*

Recall your statement earlier in our debate that you didn't wish to do my homework for me. I am merely applying your own standard. I don't have time or energy to school you in proper historical methodology or Ludemann's nuanced argument. You have ample ability to figure it out.

*I have no problem with this complaint. Would you also say this about NT Wright, Greg Bahnsen, Cornelius Van Til, et al.?*

Greg Bahnsen only wrote one full length apologetics book, and its not very long (*Always Ready*)  
Van Til is difficult because his English was not the best, and his use of terms was confusing.  
NT Wright definitely churns out a lot of tomes.

*I figured this much. Why would you be curious what they have to say?*

Some of them avoid stating their epistemology. At one point I thought Loftus was a logical positivist but now I'm not sure. Just thought it was a good chance to see where everyone stood in relation to Objectivism, which seems to be the controversial atheist position (and no that doesn't mean its true/false).

*Does the improbable ever happen?*

Yes, take the supernatural event of the resurrection for example. By definition is is the least probable event historically speaking. :-)

*I gave numerous examples of Christians making this claim, none of them referencing Ludemann and none of them tempering their pronouncements with latitudes of probability. I gave as a counter-example a story I have learned myself which clearly defies the "rule" which Christian apologists uncritically parrot in their defenses.*

Popular apologetics books aren't written with the erudition that you or I would desire. But in their defense, and as the Blomberg quote already stated, there simply isn't a single example of a legend from that time period developing in less than a generation. There is actually a pretty impressive data sample for that claim too, so I can see why they are so confident about the probability. I would say its highly implausible rather than implying that its impossible, but thats just me. I'm with you in saying that they some of them make it sound impossible rather than implausible.

David: "I'm saying that if an argument's conclusion is 'in x historical context, its probable that y' then you may not counter it with the argument 'in z historical context, its the case that not y'."

*And as reasons for this you cited certain technological advances which "could propogate [sic] a legend in less than a minute (television, internet, radio, cell phone)." I think the counter-example I gave can easily serve as a contender, for there was ample opportunity for the story to spread mouth to mouth (it certainly did not go over the radio or television lines, and e-mail is not a common mode of communication in the culture in question, not yet anyway). As I pointed out, the group of friends regularly gathered, at school and other venues, where they could have shared their stories. The story about Bo's post-suicide appearances had spread within just a couple weeks. The role of the technological advances you mentioned in the transmission of this story is either non-existent or minimal at best.*

If you are still arguing against "its impossible" then lets not waste more time since I agree that its possible. We could go on forever arguing about the historical context differences. Your counter example demonstrates that its possible at some point in the entire history of mankind for a similar legend to develop in a short period.

Awesome! At least you didn't use Elvis like someone else once did, that was just hilarious. :-)

*How does Blomberg know that in the case of Jesus' resurrection story, we don't "have the decades (or sometimes centuries) needed for it to have developed"? As I had pointed out in my blog, if the Jesus Paul was talking about had lived and died long before his own time (his own statements allow for this, as I have shown), then yes, we do see sufficient time here.*

Right, if your position is correct then of course the very example in question is the exception to the rule and the very reason for stating the rule is moot....but something tells me Blomberg wouldn't agree with your position.

*So, since the sources I cited "are introductory and summary style books," it's okay for them to substitute the probable nature of a conclusion with pronouncements of certainty, and also to fail to mention Ludemann as the source of the argument whose conclusion they have bastardized?*

Well as I've already said, the certainty of historical theories is almost never certain. Its actually quite common to remove "probably" from a conclusion if its obvious. Habermas cites Ludemann all the time even in his popular works. The Frame quote from *Five Views on Apologetics* is a one-liner so it doesn't suprise me that no references are given. Kreeft & Tracelli appear to overstate the case, and probably Mcdowell too.

*Regardless, I find the claim that a legend cannot develop within less than say 20 or 40 years utterly incredible. But I can understand why apologists for a fictional position would find it expedient.*

You're still beating the straw man. They aren't arguing that. If you want the real arguments read their scholarly stuff.

*So why don't Geisler and Turek cite Ludemann instead of Craig? Are they afraid to point their readers to a non-Christian source, or give the impression that Ludemann is some kind of authority (as you apparently think)?*

- a. I don't know, but there are plenty of non-Christian sources in the book
- b. I don't give the impression that Ludemann is some kind of authority, but he did put in a lot of work on that argument.

*David, what gives you the idea that I am trying to "refute probability"? If Ludemann's conclusion is admitted only to be probable in nature, I don't need to refute it. Since the improbable can and often does happen, it's no worry to me.*

Again, historians work with probability! I agree with you that historically speaking you have no argument against Ludemann or Habermas. If you can find one person who actually explicitly says its impossible, then you have refuted them. Go get em!

Anyways, thanks for another round of stimulating exchange.

[November 24, 2008 9:58 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "Historians make the arguments and popular works try to present them to the public."

Or, in the case of the examples which I have given, they ignore the argument part and present the conclusion as an incontestable certainty rather than a probability.

David: "Historical arguments are almost always concluded with probable certainty about an event,"

I guess that depends on who's presenting it.

David: "but your point stands that these apologists should clarify exactly what they mean since the general public may not realize the inductive nature of historical work."

I think these apologists are pretty clear on what they mean. I suspect they have no intention on watering down their position with probabilistic assessments. That would be too much of a concession to bear.

David: “So when you say ‘Everyone seems very certain that a legend could not develop earlier than a generation, or even two!’ it tells me that the general public may be thinking the same thing.”

Well, if they’re reading these sources, that is the gist of what they’re being told.

I asked: *Well, you’ve contributed quite a bit of blogorrhea already, David. In fact, you’re the one who brought up Ludemann’s theory in the first place. When asked for his conclusion in his own words and for a synopsis of how he drew that conclusion, you seem to be pooping out. What gives here?*

David: “Recall your statement earlier in our debate that you didn’t wish to do my homework for me. I am merely applying your own standard. I don’t have time or energy to school you in proper historical methodology or Ludemann’s nuanced argument. You have ample ability to figure it out.”

I expected this. No matter though. The whole matter seems moot to me anyhow. Given what I’ve learned about the world and people and philosophical viewpoints, I’m quite persuaded that legends can crop up rather easily, and quickly, under certain conditions. I think those conditions were firmly in place in first century Palestine (see below).

I wrote: *I have no problem with this complaint. Would you also say this about NT Wright, Greg Bahnsen, Cornelius Van Til, et al.?*

David: “Greg Bahnsen only wrote one full length apologetics book, and its not very long (*Always Ready*)”

I wasn’t thinking of *Always Ready*, which is hardly worth the paper it’s written on. I had in mind his larger work, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings & Analysis*, which is over 700 pages long (albeit tiresomely repetitive). The 2009 American Vision catalog announces a new book by Bahnsen, even though he’s been dead for almost 13 years. It’s called *Van Til’s Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended*, and it looks like a substantial doorstop by the picture they have of it. It does not say how many pages or when it will be available or how much it will cost, but I’m assured it’s going to blow every atheist worth his salt out of the water! ;)

David: “Van Til is difficult because his English was not the best, and his use of terms was confusing.”

Van Til put out some forty books, and dozens of published and unpublished essays, syllabi, pamphlets, etc. His substandard proficiency at English is noteworthy, given that he came to the US when he was 10 years old. Contrast this with Ayn Rand, whose native tongue was Russian (not the closer relative of Dutch) and who moved to the US when she was 21. Within just a few short years she had become a Hollywood screenwriter.

David: “NT Wright definitely churns out a lot of tomes.”

Do they qualify as “writings [which] tend to be a bit excessive in length”?

David: “Some of [the DCers] avoid stating their epistemology.”

You’re right. In fact, sometimes I wonder what some of the DCers stand *for*. It’s a given that they’re against Christianity. I don’t read them very closely though, so there’s probably a lot that I miss.

David: “At one point I thought Loftus was a logical positivist but now I’m not sure.”

I never got that impression of John. But again, there’s a lot of content that I’ve missed.

I asked: *Does the improbable ever happen?*

David: “Yes, take the supernatural event of the resurrection for example. By definition is is the least probable event historically speaking. :-)”

Yes, that’s what I’ve been told. The resurrection of Jesus is super improbable. Of course, if one believes in the supernatural to begin with, I have no idea how he assesses what is probable and what is improbable. With supernaturalism, it seems all bets are out either way. In Christianity, Jesus’ resurrection was planned from the foundations of the world, which, I would think, would make it utterly inevitable, even historically speaking (since according to Christianity, all events in history have been pre-planned). Regardless, Christians themselves are often trying to impress me with figures vouching for how improbable the resurrection is. Take for instance Harvey

Burnett's illustrative example:

*The chances are 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. Which is equivalent to taking as many silver dollars as it would take, and cover the state of Texas with them until it was 2 FEET deep. Then mark ONE Silver Dollar, stir the coins up thoroughly all over the state, put a blindfold on a man, tell him he can travel as far as he wishes within the state but he MUST pick out the ONE marked coin... In other words There's NO CHANCE one man could have fulfilled all of these 8 prophecies yet alone the ADDITIONAL 40 in his lifetime with the precision that was done unless HE IS GOD.*

As [I pointed out in response to Harvey](#):

If I told Harvey that, under the conditions he describes, I know someone who found the one marked silver dollar in the 100,000,000,000,000,000 coins that buried the state of Texas on the very first draw, would Harvey believe me? According to Harvey's own statement, apparently not, for he insists that "There's NO CHANCE one man could have" done this - either find that one coin, or that "one man could have fulfilled all of these 8 prophecies." It seems that Harvey himself is telling us that this is not to be believed, given the proportions of the stated improbability. It is just a made up story that the guy I know found the coin on the first try.

Now of course, if we add to this context the admission that is possible for a legend to have generated the resurrection story, then things are even worse for the Christian. Possibility is grounds for reasonable doubt. This is why Van Til & Co. were so adamantly opposed to theistic arguments which supported probabilistic conclusions. They knew that it was a losing gamble from the start.

David: "Popular apologetics books aren't written with the erudition that you or I would desire."

The issue at hand is not merely a matter of books lacking erudition. They're downright misleading, and deliberately so. But you wanted to defend this:

David: "But in their defense, and as the Blomberg quote already stated, there simply isn't a single example of a legend from that time period developing in less than a generation."

Well, that's the claim. And of course, even if we accept this, as I have pointed out, Wells has already indicated how his legend theory is compatible with this supposition.

David: "There is actually a pretty impressive data sample for that claim too, so I can see why they are so confident about the probability."

Of course, as the examples I've trotted out demonstrate, there's no suggestion of probability behind their claims on this matter. They don't even produce arguments to support their claims about how long a legend needs in order to develop. They run through this in passing (Frame's "one-liner" as you called it being rather typical), presenting their claims as if they were incontestable absolutes. But that's not the case. It's dishonest.

David: "I'm with you in saying that they some of them make it sound impossible rather than implausible."

That's good, David. I'm glad you've made this clear.

David: "If you are still arguing against 'its impossible' then lets not waste more time since I agree that its possible."

Sounds good to me!

David: "Your counter example demonstrates that its possible *at some point in the entire history of mankind* for a similar legend to develop in a short period."

It's just one example of many I've heard since I've gotten to know certain Asian cultures more intimately. I've heard LOTS of stories, David. Where earlier it seems that you think the spread of a legend depends on the availability of technological advances, I'm more inclined to think that the generation of legends and the credulity of those who glom onto them has to do with their underlying worldview. If an individual has accepted the primacy of consciousness as a fundamental part of his understanding of reality, he is naturally going to be more predisposed to believing in fantastic stories (e.g., those with supernatural content) than if he hadn't accept it.

The primacy of consciousness is alive and well in many Asian cultures, today as well as in the past. The bible itself is more than sufficient evidence that it enjoyed wide currency in first century Palestine.

David: "Awesome! At least you didn't use Elvis like someone else once did, that was just hilarious. :-)"

It may be before your time, David, but I remember those Elvis sightings stories quite vividly. Indeed, they're hilarious. Nonsense like that is hilarious to me. But I wouldn't be surprised if some people took those stories seriously. After all, Elvis was the king, you know.

David: "Right, if your position is correct then of course the very example in question is the exception to the rule and the very reason for stating the rule is moot....but something tells me Blomberg wouldn't agree with your position."

I wouldn't expect Blomberg to agree with my position, nor would I care.

David: "You're still beating the straw man. They aren't arguing that."

In a sense, you're right, at least on this last point - that "they aren't arguing that". Indeed, they aren't *arguing* that a legend cannot develop within less than a generation or two (or centuries, as the legend of how long it takes for a legend to build itself grows). They don't argue this, they *assert* it, and provide no substantiation for it.

David: "If you want the real arguments read their scholarly stuff."

I suppose if they had a good argument for their claim that "two generations is too short to allow legendary tendencies to wipe out the hard core of historical fact" (Geisler-Turek) or that "legends take centuries to develop" (Fernandes), these authors would have produced it in support of what they do in fact claim (with no hint of it being a matter of probability).

David: "I agree with you that historically speaking you have no argument against Ludemann or Habermas."

It's not that I have no argument against them, I don't need an argument against them. Their probabilistic position allows for the possibility of mine. That's enough for me.

David: "If you can find one person who actually explicitly says its impossible, then you have refuted them. Go get em!"

Roger Roger!

Regards,  
Dawson

[November 24, 2008 9:21 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

*Or, in the case of the examples which I have given, they ignore the argument part and present the conclusion as an incontestable certainty rather than a probability.*

Historically speaking, the conclusion is as certain as could be hoped for with regards to the legends of the first century. It is very common to omit 'probably' when the conclusion is highly probable. Historically, we are not *certain* that Julius Caesar or Alexander the Great ever existed, but the probability is very high. You are unlikely to find a history book that says "It is highly probably that Julius Caesar existed." Its just assumed that historically speaking, we have sufficient certainty on that matter - i.e. a high probability. Given the fact that we have data on myths/legends from the first century, and none (according to Blomberg) developed faster than a generation, I think its ok for someone to speak of it as being historically certain - because everyone should understand that historical certainty and deductive certainty are not synonymous. You seem to feel as if apologists are quoting this with "incontestable certainty" but I think thats quite an overstatement on your part. Even though I agree they should clarify, I don't think its dishonest to omit probability from the conclusion.

If I wrote, "Julius Caesar couldn't have known Cleopatra i because he wasn't alive yet," no one (in their right mind)



would accuse me of obscuring the facts by omitting the fact that actually there is an infinitesimal possibility that all our data on him is skew and he was really born earlier.

For an inductive argument, the conclusion's probability is conditional in relation to the premises, so they all multiply out. For instance:

P1 If it rains, it pours (80% probability)

P2 If it pours, it floods (90% probability)

P3 If it floods, we evacuate (80% probability)

(probably) Therefore, if it rains, we evacuate. (57.6% probability)

*I think these apologists are pretty clear on what they mean. I suspect they have no intention on watering down their position with probabilistic assessments. That would be too much of a concession to bear.*

There are all sorts of things that scholars omit when writing for the general public. I think its unfair to put that expectation on apologists, when historians all over the field are omitting "probably." If all the work is done in peer-reviewed journals and disseration, then there is no need to cite something that isn't accessible to the average reader. I'm reading a popular sociology book right now, and there are plenty of assertions which I'm sure come from some case study or statistical analysis. Just because the author doesn't cite the source doesn't allow me to conclude that their isn't a good argument for it or he's making it up. It may just mean that the original source isn't one which is accessible outside of academia and the conclusion isn't controversial, and thus is not necessary to cite within a popular writing. If I wanted to pursue higher education in sociology, then I should be reading the primary sources anyways and not popular works on the matter. QED, there are conventions in academia that you don't agree with; however, don't blame the apologists for doing the same thing their peers do.

*I expected this. No matter though. The whole matter seems moot to me anyhow. Given what I've learned about the world and people and philosophical viewpoints, I'm quite persuaded that legends can crop up rather easily, and quickly, under certain conditions. I think those conditions were firmly in place in first century Palestine (see below).*

There are tons of ancient legends that developed about rabbis, magicians, sorcerers, you name it. You are persuaded that they can crop up when certain conditions were in place...well, then what stopped it all these other times? Why is Jesus the exception to the rule?

*Do they qualify as "writings [which] tend to be a bit excessive in length"?*

*The Resurrection of the Son of God* is extremely long but not excessive. The difference between you and Wright is you waste space with asperse rhetoric. :-)

*If an individual has accepted the primacy of consciousness as a fundamental part of his understanding of reality, he is naturally going to be more predisposed to believing in fantastic stories (e.g., those with supernatural content) than if he hadn't accept it.*

Does Objectivism deny the existence of non-material things? For instance, is the number 3 part of existence? No long explanation needed, just yes or no will do.

[November 25, 2008 10:14 AM](#)

[Eliyahu](#) said...

Has anyone in this blog excluding myself looked at the Talpiot tomb of Y'shua ben Yoseph as evidence for the existence of the man? It can be done with the least amount of religious bias.

[November 25, 2008 10:33 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Eliyahu,

More recently, there has been an archaeological discovery that supports the conclusion a man called Christ

(probably) existed in the first century and performed miracles. It will take a few more years for scholars to argue and fine tune the analysis, but chances are this will be in the next Josh McDowell book, hahahaha.

<http://dsc.discovery.com/news/2008/10/01/jesus-bowl.html>

[November 25, 2008 10:41 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "Historically speaking, the conclusion is as certain as could be hoped for with regards to the legends of the first century."

This doesn't seem to be saying very much. How certain is this?

By the way, if it's so highly probable that it takes a legend a generation or more to develop, how do you explain the stories about Bo, the girl who killed herself in 2002? These stories were circulating within a week or two of her death, and by people who knew her personally. Do you really think the quick development of these stories can be accounted for by the fact that a few of them had cell phones?

You have repeatedly pointed to Ludemann, and now to Blomberg, who have done all this work in the area of how long it takes for a legend to develop, who have amassed all this data which supposedly seals this conclusion "as certain as could be hoped for," and yet you've not indicated what this data is or indicated exactly what their arguments for this conclusion is. You indicated in your previous message that you're not going to do my homework for me. Fine, you don't have to. But if you're going to continue to repeat a conclusion, I'm going to continue to point out that you've not presented the data to support it. You want to call that "rhetoric," but is it really?

David: "There are tons of ancient legends that developed about rabbis, magicians, sorcerers, you name it. You are persuaded that they can crop up when certain conditions were in place...well, then what stopped it all these other times? Why is Jesus the exception to the rule?"

I don't think the Jesus story is an exception to the rule. I think the primacy of consciousness played a role in the development of the Jesus story as much as it did in these other stories.

David: "Does Objectivism deny the existence of non-material things?"

What *is* a "non-material thing"? By calling it "non-material," you're only telling me what it *isn't*, not what it *is*. If something exists, it has an identity. What is the identity of something you call "non-material"?

David: "For instance, is the number 3 part of existence?"

Numbers are conceptual, they are not entities. They are epistemological (having to do with measurement and cognition), not metaphysical. They are part of the function of human minds, and in this sense they exist (essentially, they *happen*, since conceptual integration is an action of consciousness). But they are not entities in and of themselves.

So rather than calling numbers "non-material things" (which doesn't tell us what they *are*), we recognize them as conceptual (which does tell us what they are). And a good theory of concepts explains how they can be formed in accordance with fact, i.e., in compliance with the primacy of existence principle.

Incidentally, if numbers are an example of a "non-material thing," then it seems that other "non-material things" would, like numbers, also be abstractions formed by conscious processes. I strongly doubt you would want to go this route. For if your god is likewise "non-material," then I would take this as a tacit admission that your god is something produced by your mind, specifically your imagination. Indeed, theists indicate no alternative to imagination as the means by which I could understand or access this thing they call "God," and additionally they do not explain how I can reliably distinguish between what they call "God" and what they may simply be imagining.

Regards,  
Dawson

[November 25, 2008 8:52 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

*By the way, if it's so highly probable that it takes a legend a generation or more to develop, how do you explain the stories about Bo, the girl who killed herself in 2002? These stories were circulating within a week or two of her death, and by people who knew her personally. Do you really think the quick development of these stories can be accounted for by the fact that a few of them had cell phones?*

...legends of the first century.

*But if you're going to continue to repeat a conclusion, I'm going to continue to point out that you've not presented the data to support it. You want to call that "rhetoric," but is it really?*

Do I need to list out each 1st century legend and the time it took to develop before you think I've presented the data to support it? Following the pattern, I would need that argument, then argue for all its premises, and then argue for any premises to conclude those premises...all the way back to "existence exists" I suppose. :-)

It has to stop somewhere, and the premise - that all the known 1st century legends developed in a generation or more - is a) uncontroversial and b) anyone with a library card can falsify it.

So only if you genuinely disbelieve the premise am I willing to make a trip to the library. I don't wish to play the debate tactics game, where one just keeps saying "now justify that premise too" until his opponent gets tired or concedes the point.

*I don't think the Jesus story is an exception to the rule. I think the primacy of consciousness played a role in the development of the Jesus story as much as it did in these other stories.*

You didn't answer my question. If you are confident that the conditions were in place to foster a quick Jesus legend, then why did this not happen in all the other instances?

Thanks for answering my question about numbers. Just to clarify: if humans didn't exist then numbers would never \*happen\* right?

[November 26, 2008 8:35 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I asked: *By the way, if it's so highly probable that it takes a legend a generation or more to develop, how do you explain the stories about Bo, the girl who killed herself in 2002? These stories were circulating within a week or two of her death, and by people who knew her personally. Do you really think the quick development of these stories can be accounted for by the fact that a few of them had cell phones?*

David: "...legends of the first century."

Of course, this doesn't answer my question. We both know full well that 2002 is not in the first century, but legends are not a new phenomenon in the 21st century either. Perhaps I'm wrong in calling the story about Bo's post-suicidal appearances a legend. That's why I think it's important to have Ludemann's argument in his own words if we're going to speak intelligibly about his findings. I was thinking about this very issue last night as I was laying in bed trying to coax myself to sleep. Naturally I don't think Bo was really doing all these things she's believed to have done after she committed suicide. So I have casually considered it a legend, but maybe I'm wrong in referring to the stories I've learned with this term. What does Ludemann mean by 'legend', and what does he mean to say when a legend 'develops' (assuming he uses this terminology)? Does the story I've related to you about Bo and her post-mortem appearances qualify as a legend? Why or why not? If it does qualify as a legend, is what happened in the first couple weeks after her suicide a "development"? When Ludemann says (if he says it) that a legend most probably takes a generation or two to develop, what is it that he is saying needs this amount of time to happen? Is it that the initial idea behind the story needs this amount of time to be conceived or imagined? If so, how did he come to this conclusion? Or, is he saying that it typically takes a generation or two for a certain level of detail to have worked its way into the fabric of the story? If so, what is that level of detail, how did he identify that level of detail as significant for his purposes, and how did he conclude that a generation or two is usually required for that level of detail to work its way into the fabric of the story? Or, is he saying that it takes a generation or more for the story to become widely accepted? If so, what constitutes widely accepted,

and what do we call the story before it reaches this point (if not a legend)? How did he conclude any of this? Or maybe he's arguing that it takes a generation or more for the story (call it a legend now) to be written down. If so, how did he conclude this?

Essentially, I think I need a better understanding of Ludemann's thesis. If you are unable or unwilling to shed more light on this, just let me know.

I asked: *But if you're going to continue to repeat a conclusion, I'm going to continue to point out that you've not presented the data to support it. You want to call that "rhetoric," but is it really?*

David: "Do I need to list out each 1st century legend and the time it took to develop before you think I've presented the data to support it?"

I'll let you determine this, since this is a question of how exhibits substantiate the thesis in question. At this point, I'm more interested in the definitions which figure in that thesis, which my questions above are intended to help tease out. Then I would want to see what the whole argument is (premises and the conclusion they're intended to support). Then you could explain the mechanics of how the exhibits were used in experiments to support the conclusion.

David: "Following the pattern, I would need that argument, then argue for all its premises, and then argue for any premises to conclude those premises...all the way back to "existence exists" I suppose. :-)"

If the link back to reality (assuming there is one) is not reasonably discernable, this may be necessary.

David: "It has to stop somewhere, and the premise - that all the known 1st century legends developed in a generation or more - is a) uncontroversial and b) anyone with a library card can falsify it."

Well, that's the claim, but no substance has been presented to persuade me that it's the case. I'm not saying it isn't the case, mind you. I'm happy either way. Besides, I do not have a library card (not any more anyway), and I certainly do not have the time to go digging in a library to falsify something that, in our discussion at least, has not been substantiated in the first place.

By the way, there's [an interesting discussion over at DC](#) in which Steven Carr has asked if "any New Religious Movement [has] ever produced a short creed to be memorised by people within six months of forming?" His question was prompted apparently by statements by Gary Habermas to the effect that early Christians had formed a creed very soon after Jesus' crucifixion and alleged appearances thereafter. Perhaps the early formation of creeds was supernaturally motivated?

David: "So only if you genuinely disbelieve the premise am I willing to make a trip to the library."

I had assumed that you were familiar with Ludemann's basic argument and the terms he incorporates into it, per my above questions.

David: "I don't wish to play the debate tactics game,"

Neither do I, David. I just wanted to know how you would explain the story about Bo's post-suicidal appearances, granting the conclusion which you've attributed to Ludemann, Blomberg and who knows who else regarding legends needing a generation or more to develop. I don't think I'm out of order on this, do you?

David: "where one just keeps saying 'now justify that premise too' until his opponent gets tired or concedes the point."

You aren't afraid that I'm going to wear you down, are you David? You've proven your stamina. You've also proven that you're quite eager to dialogue with me; you keep coming back to me - do I have something you want? If anything, I'm trying to encourage you.

I wrote: *I don't think the Jesus story is an exception to the rule. I think the primacy of consciousness played a role in the development of the Jesus story as much as it did in these other stories.*

David: "You didn't answer my question."

Oh, I thought I did. In asking your question, you had stated:

*You are persuaded that they can crop up when certain conditions were in place...well, then what stopped it all these other times? Why is Jesus the exception to the rule?*

I had already indicated to you what I think is a necessary condition for legends to develop, namely the acceptance of the primacy of consciousness as part of one's fundamental understanding of reality. That's first and foremost. Given this condition as "the rule," I don't think the Jesus story is any exception to it; it's got primacy of consciousness written all over it. But you seem to think that the rule has to do with the speed at which a legend develops, which I don't see as fundamental.

David: "If you are confident that the conditions were in place to foster a quick Jesus legend, then why did this not happen in all the other instances?"

For one thing, I don't know that it didn't happen in these other instances; I've been told that it didn't, but that's not the same as me knowing this. And until we have more clarity what it is that supposedly takes a generation or more to happen, I don't really know what you're claiming when these other first century legends needed a generation or more. Another thing, as I've pointed out several times now, my view is compatible with legends taking a long time to develop (as I understand this to mean), as the Wells quote I gave in [my blog](#) makes clear. So as I mentioned above, I'm happy either way.

David: "Thanks for answering my question about numbers. Just to clarify: if humans didn't exist then numbers would never \*happen\* right?"

I don't think there would be \*any\* concepts without a consciousness which grasps reality in conceptual form. And human beings are the only organisms I know of which do this. So if there were no human beings, there would be no concepts denoting quantities. Does that help?

I don't think numbers are things that are lying around the universe waiting to be picked up by some receiver. I also don't think that numbers are conscious things. They aren't "spirits" or "ghosts" if you will.

Regards,  
Dawson

[November 26, 2008 10:08 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson: I asked: By the way, if it's so highly probable that it takes a legend a generation or more to develop, how do you explain the stories about Bo, the girl who killed herself in 2002? These stories were circulating within a week or two of her death, and by people who knew her personally. Do you really think the quick development of these stories can be accounted for by the fact that a few of them had cell phones?

David: "...legends of the first century."

Dawson: *Of course, this doesn't answer my question.*

What kind of explanation are you looking for? What else can it accomplish besides (as I've said thrice now) showing that at some point in history its possible for a legend to develop that quickly? If there is something else you're getting at let me know, because I feel we're repeating ourselves.

*So I have casually considered it a legend, but maybe I'm wrong in referring to the stories I've learned with this term. What does Ludemann mean by 'legend', and what does he mean to say when a legend 'develops' (assuming he uses this terminology)? Does the story I've related to you about Bo and her post-mortem appearances qualify as a legend? Why or why not? If it does qualify as a legend, is what happened in the first couple weeks after her suicide a "development"? When Ludemann says (if he says it) that a legend most probably takes a generation or two to develop, what is it that he is saying needs this amount of time to happen? Is it that the initial idea behind the story needs this amount of time to be conceived or imagined? If so, how did he come to this conclusion? Or, is he saying that it typically takes a generation or two for a certain level of detail to have worked its way into the fabric of the story? If so, what is that level of detail, how did he identify that level of detail as significant for his purposes, and how did he conclude that a generation or two is usually*

*required for that level of detail to work its way into the fabric of the story? Or, is he saying that it takes a generation or more for the story to become widely accepted? If so, what constitutes widely accepted, and what do we call the story before it reaches this point (if not a legend)? How did he conclude any of this? Or maybe he's arguing that it takes a generation or more for the story (call it a legend now) to be written down. If so, how did he conclude this?*

Those are all great questions which you should ask the author directly by examining his book. Any history professor would beg for a student like you. Hey, maybe you can do a 12 part response to Ludemann! :-) My favorite part of reading a book is asking it as many questions as I can. Besides, you'll get much more out of Ludemann than me.

*Essentially, I think I need a better understanding of Ludemann's thesis. If you are unable or unwilling to shed more light on this, just let me know.*

As much as I enjoy it, I don't have the time to provide you with a detailed exposition of his argument. Maybe you could hire some college kid to do a book report for extra cash. As I said before, if you want to understand Ludemann's thesis you should probably read it for yourself. Don't take my word for it. There is no way for me to give you all the information you want without essentially repeating the entire book. Can you see how much wasted effort this would be on my part?

*I certainly do not have the time to go digging in a library to falsify something that, in our discussion at least, has not been substantiated in the first place.*

You've spent plenty of time this week trying to falsify it, and admittedly you don't understand it. I have clearly presented the argument and now if you wish to examine the terms it more closely you have a framework to start from. I'm happy with that.

*By the way, there's an interesting discussion over at DC in which Steven Carr has asked if "any New Religious Movement [has] ever produced a short creed to be memorised by people within six months of forming?" His question was prompted apparently by statements by Gary Habermas to the effect that early Christians had formed a creed very soon after Jesus' crucifixion and alleged appearances thereafter. Perhaps the early formation of creeds was supernaturally motivated?*

Just the same old Jewish oral tradition with new content as far as I know.

*I just wanted to know how you would explain the story about Bo's post-suicidal appearances, granting the conclusion which you've attributed to Ludemann, Blomberg and who knows who else regarding legends needing a generation or more to develop. I don't think I'm out of order on this, do you?*

I'm still not convinced you agree that:

- a) Bo's story does is not subsumed under the conclusion of the argument in question, therefore it is impotent with respect to countering it.
- b) Probability arguments cannot be countered with isolated instances

It doesn't matter whether we grant the conclusion or reject it. Bo's story doesn't pertain to it.

*You aren't afraid that I'm going to wear you down, are you David? You've proven your stamina. You've also proven that you're quite eager to dialogue with me; you keep coming back to me - do I have something you want? If anything, I'm trying to encourage you.*

Haha, good point. Do appreciate the encouragement.

*I had already indicated to you what I think is a necessary condition for legends to develop, namely the acceptance of the primacy of consciousness as part of one's fundamental understanding of reality. That's first and foremost. Given this condition as "the rule," I don't think the Jesus story is any exception to it; it's got primacy of consciousness written all over it. But you seem to think that the rule has to do with the speed at which a legend develops, which I don't see as fundamental.*

But why **only** the Jesus story in the first century? The primacy of consciousness was rampid. Why do the other legends take so much longer?

Also by "the rule" I mean the fact that all other legends didn't develop this way. The primacy of consciousness was certainly a factor that helped make "the rule."

*I don't think there would be \*any\* concepts without a consciousness which grasps reality in conceptual form. And human beings are the only organisms I know of which do this. So if there were no human beings, there would be no concepts denoting quantities. Does that help?*

Yes thanks.

[November 27, 2008 8:57 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Just thought you would be interested to know that the alleged ossuary of James (which is inscribed with ""James son of Joseph brother of Jesus") has gone to trial for fraud, and turns out the case couldn't be made. Doesn't mean its authentic of course, but interesting known the less.

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/10/29/MN3U13QHMD.DTL>

<http://christiancadre.blogspot.com/2008/11/james-ossuary-prosecution-faces.html>

[November 27, 2008 11:09 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hi David,

Happy Thanksgiving! I hope you enjoyed your day.

I wrote: *Of course, this doesn't answer my question.*

David: "What kind of explanation are you looking for? What else can it accomplish besides (as I've said thrice now) showing that at some point in history its possible for a legend to develop that quickly?"

That's not what I'm asking, as I already know it's possible for legends to develop quickly, and I already know that you've acknowledged this. No, what I'm asking is what you think really happened. These people who say they saw Bo after she had died knew her intimately and were her close friends. How could this happen? If you don't believe Bo really appeared to them after she had committed suicide, what happened? Do you think it's the work of the devil? Do you think that some mass hysteria has afflicted them? Hallucinations perhaps? A conspiracy? Perhaps Bo swooned? Apparently you don't think it's a typical legend, for typical legends usually take a generation or longer to "develop," isn't that so? Would you even qualify it as a legend? Why or why not?

David: "Those are all great questions which you should ask the author directly by examining his book."

I don't recall you ever giving the title of Ludemann's book which you keep referencing. If you had, please forgive me for troubling you - could you give it again?

David: "Any history professor would beg for a student like you. Hey, maybe you can do a 12 part response to Ludemann! :-)"

Hey, maybe! (By the way, was that rhetoric or sarcasm, David? ;)

David: "My favorite part of reading a book is asking it as many questions as I can. Besides, you'll get much more out of Ludemann than me."

Well, that's disappointing, David. I thought you were familiar with Ludemann's thesis, or at least still had access to the book in which he delivers it. I did not think that asking what Ludemann's definition of legend was too much.

I wrote: *Essentially, I think I need a better understanding of Ludemann's thesis. If you are unable or unwilling to shed more light on this, just let me know.*



David: "As much as I enjoy it, I don't have the time to provide you with a detailed exposition of his argument."

Well, you've had sufficient time to invest in our discussion this far. And I didn't realize that a detailed exposition of his argument is what it would take for some more clarity on his position. I figured at least some basic definitions of key terms and a general outline of the argument would suffice. I had figured you were sufficiently familiar with Ludemann's thesis to present this, perhaps even blindfolded and with both arms tied behind your back. I guess I was wrong. But that's puzzling, because you seem so convinced that he's right on this matter. Hmmmm....

David: "Maybe you could hire some college kid to do a book report for extra cash."

You're one of the few people I'm in contact with now who's in college, David. Or aren't you? I thought you were. Unfortunately, things are rather tight now. I won't be able to give you any cash. Sorry.

David: "As I said before, if you want to understand Ludemann's thesis you should probably read it for yourself."

Apparently so. I'm not getting much meat and potatoes on the matter from you.

David: "Don't take my word for it. There is no way for me to give you all the information you want without essentially repeating the entire book. Can you see how much wasted effort this would be on my part?"

I guess this is where Jesus might say, "O ye of little faith." How do you know your effort would be wasted? And really, would a few definitions and a general outline require you to repeat the entire book? It must be pretty thin. Perhaps I could read it in one sitting.

*I wrote: I certainly do not have the time to go digging in a library to falsify something that, in our discussion at least, has not been substantiated in the first place.*

David: "You've spent plenty of time this week trying to falsify it,"

Actually, I've not been trying to falsify it. This is where you're mistaken, David. I'm not trying to falsify it. I wouldn't try to. If you believe Ludemann has cinched the case that all legends took more than a generation to develop in first century Palestine, then darn tootin', have at it. I just wanted to know what specifically this is saying and how it was established.

David: "and admittedly you don't understand it."

Well, that's not my fault. I've been asking relevant questions. But all I've been given so far is, apparently, the conclusion of the argument. I've not seen the premises, the data cited to support it, even the basic definitions of its key terms. Don't blame me.

David: "I have clearly presented the argument"

I don't think you have. If it's unclear what constitutes a legend, what constitutes "development" of a legend, what exactly takes a generation or more to happen, what the premises of the argument are, and what data are used to support it, it's not been clearly presented. When asked for these things, you poop out and say you don't have time.

David: "and now if you wish to examine the terms it more closely you have a framework to start from. I'm happy with that."

What framework?

*I wrote: By the way, there's an interesting discussion over at DC in which Steven Carr has asked if "any New Religious Movement [has] ever produced a short creed to be memorised by people within six months of forming?" His question was prompted apparently by statements by Gary Habermas to the effect that early Christians had formed a creed very soon after Jesus' crucifixion and alleged appearances thereafter. Perhaps the early formation of creeds was supernaturally motivated?*

David: "Just the same old Jewish oral tradition with new content as far as I know."

Sorry, are you saying that a creed was formulated for memorization within six months of Judaism's forming?

I wrote: *I just wanted to know how you would explain the story about Bo's post-suicidal appearances, granting the conclusion which you've attributed to Ludemann, Blomberg and who knows who else regarding legends needing a generation or more to develop. I don't think I'm out of order on this, do you?*

David: "I'm still not convinced you agree that: a) Bo's story does is not subsumed under the conclusion of the argument in question, therefore it is impotent with respect to countering it."

Again, I'm not concerned about countering an argument whose conclusion is admittedly probabilistic in nature. Just wondering how you would explain the story about Bo's post-suicidal appearances with the understanding that legends generally need a generation or more to develop.

David: "b) Probability arguments cannot be countered with isolated instances"

And I've never affirmed otherwise. They clearly allow for exceptions (and I've learned of \*many\* over the years). By the way, is your position akin to the view that, since Ludemann has (purportedly) shown that no other legend in first century Palestine developed in less than a generation, therefore the Christian legend did not develop in less than a generation?

David: "It doesn't matter whether we grant the conclusion or reject it. Bo's story doesn't pertain to it."

Is that simply because it did not originate in first century Palestine?

I wrote: *You aren't afraid that I'm going to wear you down, are you David? You've proven your stamina. You've also proven that you're quite eager to dialogue with me; you keep coming back to me - do I have something you want? If anything, I'm trying to encourage you.*

David: "Haha, good point. Do appreciate the encouragement."

Well, I thought I'd give you something to be thankful for on Thanksgiving!

I wrote: *I had already indicated to you what I think is a necessary condition for legends to develop, namely the acceptance of the primacy of consciousness as part of one's fundamental understanding of reality. That's first and foremost. Given this condition as "the rule," I don't think the Jesus story is any exception to it; it's got primacy of consciousness written all over it. But you seem to think that the rule has to do with the speed at which a legend develops, which I don't see as fundamental.*

David: "But why only the Jesus story in the first century?"

Why only what about the Jesus story?

David: "The primacy of consciousness was rampid. Why do the other legends take so much longer?"

So much longer than what? As I have pointed out several times (thrice now, at least), I think the Jesus legend stems far earlier than Paul's time. I've pointed this out specifically several times now. I'm confident that there was more than one (probably several) generation(s) between Paul and the original suffering servant figure which by Paul's time had grown in legend.

Regards,  
Dawson

[November 27, 2008 10:08 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "Just thought you would be interested to know that the alleged ossuary of James (which is inscribed with 'James son of Joseph brother of Jesus') has gone to trial for fraud, and turns out the case couldn't be made. Doesn't mean its authentic of course, but interesting known the less."

Thanks for the update. I haven't been keeping tabs on this as it is so uninteresting to me. I'm guessing that many Christians are relieved with this news though. So if the ossuary cannot be established to be a fraud, then what? What do you think?

Hey, another thing. Any more questions about numbers? Now *that* is an interesting topic.

Regards,  
Dawson

[November 27, 2008 10:12 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Happy Thanksgiving! Hope you had a good one. I weighed in at 6 lbs heavier at the end of the day :)

*That's not what I'm asking, as I already know it's possible for legends to develop quickly, and I already know that you've acknowledged this. No, what I'm asking is what you think really happened. These people who say they saw Bo after she had died knew her intimately and were her close friends. How could this happen? If you don't believe Bo really appeared to them after she had committed suicide, what happened? Do you think it's the work of the devil? Do you think that some mass hysteria has afflicted them? Hallucinations perhaps? A conspiracy? Perhaps Bo swooned? Apparently you don't think it's a typical legend, for typical legends usually take a generation or longer to "develop," isn't that so? Would you even qualify it as a legend? Why or why not?*

Well, again I think typical legends usually take a generation or longer to develop **in the first century** and probably more broadly in the ancient world. I actually haven't read any studies of legend development in our modern era. I suspect Bo's story is more typical in modernity.

I would define a legend as non-historical narrative material (oral/written) that is offered as a historical event. It could be an elaboration or just pure fabrication. Two examples that come to mind are Robin Hood and King Arthur. In contrast, I think a myth tends to be more religious and symbolic in nature. So I think Bo's story qualifies as a legend.

As to what I think happened I am not sure. Can we confirm that this wasn't a copycat phenomenon? In other words, one person has a vision then shares with another, who in turn has the same experience? The problem with collection hallucination is that the examples we have are unrelated. One example would be out west when everyone thought aliens were performing cattle mutilation. Later, it turned out that they were dying of natural causes and scavengers were eating the soft parts of their hide, which then after decomposition appeared to have been mutilated with a sharp instrument. This would technically qualify as a mass hallucination in the sense that a lot of people were convinced of the alien involvement.

But in Bo's story, I would wonder what the state of affairs is today. Are these ladies willing to go on television and share their story? This would certainly be of media interest. Are they willing to spend their life trying to convince others that this happened? Well in this case she didn't profess her death to have any real meaning so I guess that's a moot point.

*I don't recall you ever giving the title of Ludemann's book which you keep referencing. If you had, please forgive me for troubling you - could you give it again?*

The one I read was *The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry*

[http://www.amazon.com/Resurrection-Christ-Historical-Inquiry/dp/1591022452/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1227888441&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.com/Resurrection-Christ-Historical-Inquiry/dp/1591022452/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1227888441&sr=8-1)

Here is a short book review of it: <http://atheism.about.com/od/bookreviews/fr/ResurrectionChr.htm>

*Well, that's disappointing, David. I thought you were familiar with Ludemann's thesis, or at least still had access to the book in which he delivers it. I did not think that asking what Ludemann's definition of legend was too much.*

I don't recall that term being explicitly defined in the book, but I could be wrong. Basically he uses the term as any story about someone that contains elements of historical fiction.

*Well, you've had sufficient time to invest in our discussion this far. And I didn't realize that a detailed exposition of his argument is what it would take for some more clarity on his position. I figured at least some basic definitions of key terms and a general outline of the argument would suffice. I had figured you were sufficiently familiar with Ludemann's thesis to present this, perhaps even blindfolded and with both arms tied behind your back. I guess I was wrong. But that's puzzling, because you seem so convinced that he's right on this matter. Hmmm....*

I already gave a general outline of the argument. In order to go into more detail I would actually need to survey all the legends of the first century. What key terms are you looking for besides legend? If we could keep the length of these things down it would be less of an inhibition. I just can't crank out these 2 page responses all the time.

*I certainly do not have the time to go digging in a library to falsify something that, in our discussion at least, has not been substantiated in the first place.*

*Actually, I've not been trying to falsify it. This is where you're mistaken, David. I'm not trying to falsify it. I wouldn't try to. If you believe Ludemann has cinched the case that all legends took more than a generation to develop in first century Palestine, then darn tootin', have at it. I just wanted to know what specifically this is saying and how it was established.*

I was reading your first statement when I assumed you wanted to falsify it.

David: "I have clearly presented the argument"

*I don't think you have. If it's unclear what constitutes a legend, what constitutes "development" of a legend, what exactly takes a generation or more to happen, what the premises of the argument are, and what data are used to support it, it's not been clearly presented. When asked for these things, you poop out and say you don't have time.*

The argument is a rather simply inductive move, taking the trend in first century legend develop and extrapolating to a probability about Jesus' story.

As to what "development" is, the idea is that within a generation one would not see much changing of the story. People may have still been alive to disconfirm the story. After the people start dying off, the memory of the person can start to morph a bit. With no one around to say differently, it gets easier and easier to stretch the tale. But through oral tradition this takes some time to happen, because unlike our modern era, the transmission of material through oral tradition was quite accurate.

David: "and now if you wish to examine the terms it more closely you have a framework to start from. I'm happy with that."

*What framework?*

You understand the probability nature of the conclusion, and the scope of it; furthermore, you roughly know the approach he's going to take to establish it.

I wrote: By the way, there's an interesting discussion over at DC in which Steven Carr has asked if "any New Religious Movement [has] ever produced a short creed to be memorised by people within six months of forming?" His question was prompted apparently by statements by Gary Habermas to the effect that early Christians had formed a creed very soon after Jesus' crucifixion and alleged appearances thereafter. Perhaps the early formation of creeds was supernaturally motivated?

David: "Just the same old Jewish oral tradition with new content as far as I know."

*Sorry, are you saying that a creed was formulated for memorization within six months of Judaism's forming?*

No, I meant that the early Christian creeds were just applications of Jewish oral tradition to new material.

Steven Carr's point is silly. Why would we another religious movement to produce a short creed in 6 months? That's like me saying, well as any new religious movement ever produced a statue of a bald guy?

*And I've never affirmed otherwise. They clearly allow for exceptions (and I've learned of \*many\* over the years). By the way, is your position akin to the view that, since Ludemann has (purportedly) shown that no other legend in first century Palestine developed in less than a generation, therefore the Christian legend did not develop in less than a generation?*

Insert probably before "did not develop" and it looks good. Its called extrapolating from the sample to the general population. The heart of the inductive method.

David: "It doesn't matter whether we grant the conclusion or reject it. Bo's story doesn't pertain to it."

*Is that simply because it did not originate in first century Palestine?*

Yes, and also because as you've said probability allows for the possibility of the contrary.

*So much longer than what? As I have pointed out several times (thrice now, at least), I think the Jesus legend stems far earlier than Paul's time. I've pointed this out specifically several times now. I'm confident that there was more than one (probably several) generation(s) between Paul and the original suffering servant figure which by Paul's time had grown in legend.*

Is there any evidence that a suffering servant existed (probably several) generation(s) before Paul?

Ludemann accepts the basic timeline developed from the Gospels, so of course that would be a point of disagreement.

[November 28, 2008 8:32 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "I actually haven't read any studies of legend development in our modern era. I suspect Bo's story is more typical in modernity."

What leads you to suspect this? What's different about today that facilitates legends developing (however this is taken to mean) quicker than in the past?

David: "I would define a legend as non-historical narrative material (oral/written) that is offered as a historical event. It could be an elaboration or just pure fabrication. Two examples that come to mind are Robin Hood and King Arthur. In contrast, I think a myth tends to be more religious and symbolic in nature. So I think Bo's story qualifies as a legend."

Okay, that's a good start. Not so hard, was it? I take it that you did not get this definition from Ludemann, right?

So what would prevent someone (in any century) from offering non-historical narrative material (either oral or written) as historical within, say, a few weeks instead of a generation or more?

David: "As to what I think happened I am not sure. Can we confirm that this wasn't a copycat phenomenon? In other words, one person has a vision then shares with another, who in turn has the same experience?"

Good question. I couldn't say for sure. But what I have learned leads me to believe that this is not what happened. One person (Tee) had a dream on the night of Bo's suicide in which she pulled up in a bus and invited him to come along. Tee did not know at this time that Bo had committed suicide. Amm did not report having dreams about Bo, but reported actually seeing her in public shortly after her suicide. As I understand it, these were independent experiences since Amm and Tee were attending different universities at the time and would not have had much contact with each other at the time. I know that Amm was really spooked when she learned about Tee's dream, because she claimed to have seen Bo on a bus soon before learning about Tee's dream. She also said that she saw Bo in other situations as well.

David: "But in Bo's story, I would wonder what the state of affairs is today. Are these ladies willing to go on television and share their story?"

I have no idea, but I wouldn't be surprised if they were willing to. (By the way, Tee is not a lady, he's a man.) In that case, you can see a lot of strange things on TV in the Orient, strange to us anyway. I don't think this would

be too far out of the ordinary. Also, the concept of celebrity is much more fluid over there than it is in the States. Young people tend to be anxious for a spot in the limelight.

David: "This would certainly be of media interest."

One would think, but then again, there's high competition for air time, and stories like this are a dime a dozen. People over there really go for this stuff. Mysticism tends to sell very well virtually everywhere, even in our culture. Look at Stephen King, Harry Potter, Star Wars, Christianity, etc.

David: "Are they willing to spend their life trying to convince others that this happened? Well in this case she didn't profess her death to have any real meaning so I guess that's a moot point."

Trying to convince others of the reality of a mystical experience is not a big concern in many far east cultures. This is more of a western thing. In many Asian religious settings (save those stemming from the Abrahamic model), you don't find the "believe or die" thing going on. They tend to operate more on a "Wow, really?" attitude.

I wrote: *I don't recall you ever giving the title of Ludemann's book which you keep referencing. If you had, please forgive me for troubling you - could you give it again?*

David: "The one I read was *The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry*

[http://www.amazon.com/Resurrection-Christ-Historical-Inquiry/dp/1591022452/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1227888441&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.com/Resurrection-Christ-Historical-Inquiry/dp/1591022452/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1227888441&sr=8-1)

Here is a short book review of it: <http://atheism.about.com/od/bookreviews/fr/ResurrectionChr.htm>"

That's interesting. Given what all you've said about Ludemann and his research, I had figured he devoted an entire book to the topic of how legends develop. To make matters more curious, the review you linked to does not even make any mention of the work Ludemann has supposedly done on legends of the first century (I guess it was relegated to just one chapter, or perhaps a footnote?), and it tells how Ludemann argues "without reservation" that Jesus' resurrection is non-historical. Apparently Ludemann thinks the story of Jesus' resurrection is legendary (I'm inferring this, perhaps I'm wrong?), and if so, how does he "accept the basic timeline of the gospels" on the one hand, and argue that the resurrection is non-historical on the other, all the while supposing that it's improbable that any legend in the first century developed in less than a generation? I'm not saying it can't be done, but I'm quite curious how Ludemann does this, if in fact he does (or attempts to). I know, I know, go get the book, right? Well, that probably won't be happening soon. My reading list is already a mountain high, and I'm watching the pennies.

David: "What key terms are you looking for besides legend?"

"Develop" as it is used in this context. When Christians tell me that a legend cannot "develop" in less than a generation, what exactly are they talking about here? What cannot happen in this space of time?

And while you're at it, "generation" would be another one to clarify. I remember back in the 80s, when I played in a heavy metal band, I was sometimes referred to as belonging to "the next generation", even though many of those who influenced my style were still in their prime.

David: "The argument is a rather simply inductive move, taking the trend in first century legend develop and extrapolating to a probability about Jesus' story."

When I read this statement, I was reminded of Patrick Toner who, responding to Peikoff's point that consciousness is biological, retorted:

"Certainly, Peikoff is correct in saying that our only direct experience of consciousness is of our own. It is quite true that we are living organisms, and our consciousness is a faculty we possess. It's also true that our consciousness is a faculty of perceiving that which exists. It is, however, indefensible to extrapolate from these facts to the impossibility of an analogous faculty of knowing existing in a non-bodily being."

Of course, Toner never provides any factual data to support the view that consciousness can belong to "a

non-bodily being.” Apparently just being able to imagine such a thing gives him license to call it “possible.” To extrapolate, or not extrapolate... That is the question.

David: “As to what ‘development’ is, the idea is that within a generation one would not see much changing of the story.”

If the story began orally, how would one know, once it’s been written down years later, whether it’s changed or not?

In the case of Bo’s post-suicide appearances, which you seem to think qualifies as a legend, is there any evidence that you can see of it “developing”? I don’t. I still think it’s a legend (i.e., not genuinely historical), it arose in a very short time, and does not so far as I know seem to be developing. A generation has not passed; Tee and Amm and all the friends in Bo’s circle are still in their 20s. So apparently a non-historical narrative posing as history can arise very quickly and remain unchanged for quite a while, but still be unhistorical. Or would you say that’s just not possible in the case of the first century?

David: “People may have still been alive to disconfirm the story.”

Yes, they could have, but in order to have the opportunity to disconfirm a story that has spiraled beyond the truth, they would have to learn about it first. That would be a minimum requirement. And even then, they might not make any attempt to correct the record; they could be indifferent to the falsehood, or they could think an attempt to correct the record would be futile, maybe even dangerous.

Also, it’s possible that someone who knew better did learn about the legend, did try to correct the record, and got squelched by history, allowing the legend to flourish as if no one ever challenged it. In this sense, the “people would have disconfirmed it” defense ultimately crumbles into an argument from ignorance. How do we know that there was no one trying to tell Paul that the post-resurrection appearances allegedly made by Jesus were actually cases of mistaken identity blown way out of proportion by followers blinded by their own zeal? If people blind themselves by their own zeal, they most likely wouldn’t think twice about suppressing voices to the contrary.

David: “After the people start dying off, the memory of the person can start to morph a bit.”

The degree in which the memory of a person can morph can be amplified significantly given the influence of mysticism (i.e., a worldview premised on the primacy of consciousness), even within living memory. Even back in the 70’s, Martin Luther King, Jr. could be faulted with no wrongdoing whatsoever.

David: “With no one around to say differently, it gets easier and easier to stretch the tale.”

I guess I’m just not convinced that the existence of someone who might say differently would provide much resistance to the development and spread of unhistorical stories, especially given the prominence of mysticism in a culture.

David: “But through oral tradition this takes some time to happen, because unlike our modern era, the transmission of material through oral tradition was quite accurate.”

Yes, I’ve heard this claim before, but if a story is only oral for say 5 years, how does one determine that the story being told at the end of that 5-year period is true to the story that was told at the beginning of that 5-year period?

David: “No, I meant that the early Christian creeds were just applications of Jewish oral tradition to new material.”

Is there evidence that Christian creeds were developed in 30 or 31 AD?

David: “Steven Carr’s point is silly. Why would we another religious movement to produce a short creed in 6 months?”

I don’t think Carr asserted that any religious movements did produce (or needed to produce) a creed within 6 months. He simply asked a question. I’m guessing the answer is “none.”

David: “That’s like me saying, well as any new religious movement ever produced a statue of a bald guy?”



I don't see the analogy here.

I asked: *By the way, is your position akin to the view that, since Ludemann has (purportedly) shown that no other legend in first century Palestine developed in less than a generation, therefore the Christian legend did not develop in less than a generation?*

David: "Insert probably before "did not develop" and it looks good."

Okay, so the basic reasoning is: Since it is believed that no other legend in first century Palestine developed in less than a generation, it is supposed that the Christian legend therefore *probably* did not develop in less than a generation. How's that?

David: "Its called extrapolating from the sample to the general population. The heart of the inductive method."

It seems rather shaky to me, especially if it is granted that it is possible for legends to develop sooner (e.g., if there is no a priori reason to suppose it takes a generation or more for a legend to develop). There are so many variables that would have to be taken into account in such an integration, probably many we do not and cannot know because they are lost to history. I doubt such an inference could suffice as a substitute for combing through the available evidence. Christians are always telling us how unique Christianity is, but here it's lumped in with all kinds of other things. It could be another black swan. But you seem to agree with this.

David: "Is there any evidence that a suffering servant existed (probably several) generation(s) before Paul?"

I think so. In the two centuries prior to Paul, hundreds of Jewish priests were crucified alive, such as the 800 Pharisees that Josephus accounts to being crucified under Alexander Jannaeus in BC 88 (see *Antiquities* 13:14:2). Paul himself was a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5), and I would expect that he had heard stories about such horrific atrocities. Wells discusses the significance of such events to his own legend theory in the Introduction to his *The Jesus Legend*.

Regards,  
Dawson

[November 28, 2008 10:19 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

*What leads you to suspect this? What's different about today that facilitates legends developing (however this is taken to mean) quicker than in the past?*

Communication technology would be a definite catalyst as I already mentioned.

*So what would prevent someone (in any century) from offering non-historical narrative material (either oral or written) as historical within, say, a few weeks instead of a generation or more?*

Depends on how many people were aware of the actual historical event who could falsify the story and possibly offer counter evidence.

*That's interesting. Given what all you've said about Ludemann and his research, I had figured he devoted an entire book to the topic of how legends develop.*

The book will reference any other published works, but aside from that you have to visit a library which can retrieve journals and indexed dissertation material.

*To make matters more curious, the review you linked to does not even make any mention of the work Ludemann has supposedly done on legends of the first century (I guess it was relegated to just one chapter, or perhaps a footnote?), and it tells how Ludemann argues "without reservation" that Jesus' resurrection is non-historical. Apparently Ludemann thinks the story of Jesus' resurrection is legendary (I'm inferring this, perhaps I'm wrong?), and if so, how does he "accept the basic timeline of the gospels" on the one hand, and argue that the resurrection is non-historical on the other, all the while supposing that it's improbable that any legend in the first century developed in less than a generation? I'm not saying it can't be done, but I'm quite*

*curious how Ludemann does this, if in fact he does (or attempts to). I know, I know, go get the book, right? Well, that probably won't be happening soon. My reading list is already a mountain high, and I'm watching the pennies.*

He dates the Gospels late enough to be more than a generation after 30 AD.

The length of a generation varies depending on the average lifespan of humans at that particular time. Roughly 40 years in today's terms. I don't recall Ludemann explicating this in the book, but then again sometimes historians have "inside baseball" terms which one has to hunt down definitions for in other writings. Its one of the detriments to studying historical analysis when you aren't a professional historian.

*If the story began orally, how would one know, once it's been written down years later, whether it's changed or not?*

This reminds me of when you insisted that since Paul didn't say he was quoting an oral tradition, we couldn't "know" it was, despite the fact that multiple other Jewish sources quote oral tradition the same way.

Obviously at our point in history, we are not privy to the original oral traditions. We just have multiple written sources. At the time the sources were written, however, the oral tradition was still alive and well and thus falsifiable by any living eyewitnesses.

*Yes, they could have, but in order to have the opportunity to disconfirm a story that has spiraled beyond the truth, they would have to learn about it first. That would be a minimum requirement. And even then, they might not make any attempt to correct the record; they could be indifferent to the falsehood, or they could think an attempt to correct the record would be futile, maybe even dangerous.*

- a) The Jews weren't exactly happy that Christ came and started sucking people out of their religion
- b) The Roman Empire (until around 300AD) would have loved to exterminate Christianity
- c) The Jews put a high value on the accuracy of oral tradition.

*Also, it's possible that someone who knew better did learn about the legend, did try to correct the record, and got squelched by history, allowing the legend to flourish as if no one ever challenged it. In this sense, the "people would have disconfirmed it" defense ultimately crumbles into an argument from ignorance. How do we know that there was no one trying to tell Paul that the post-resurrection appearances allegedly made by Jesus were actually cases of mistaken identity blown way out of proportion by followers blinded by their own zeal? If people blind themselves by their own zeal, they most likely wouldn't think twice about suppressing voices to the contrary.*

Check out the Bible. The earliest counterargument offered by the Jews was that someone stole his body.

*I guess I'm just not convinced that the existence of someone who might say differently would provide much resistance to the development and spread of unhistorical stories, especially given the prominence of mysticism in a culture.*

Again, you have to understand just how much Rome and the Jews hated early Christianity. They would spread their own rumors about Christians drinking blood or causing major tragedy. The Christians of course would need to defend themselves against this. If there was "open and shut" evidence against the case for Christianity in the first century, there is simply no reason to believe it wouldn't have been championed by any of the anti-Christian groups. Thats the most probable explanation. It is of course possible that some select group of people knew the contrary was true but didn't speak up, but given the harsh climate of early Christianity I deem this highly implausible.

*Is there evidence that Christian creeds were developed in 30 or 31 AD?*

Yes.

I asked: By the way, is your position akin to the view that, since Ludemann has (purportedly) shown that no other legend in first century Palestine developed in less than a generation, therefore the Christian legend did not develop in less than a generation?

*Okay, so the basic reasoning is: Since it is believed that no other legend in first century Palestine developed in*

*less than a generation, it is supposed that the Christian legend therefore probably did not develop in less than a generation. How's that?*

Yup, just like the old "all observed polar bears are white, therefore inductively we can assume that probably the polar bear in that room is white." Don't remember where I heard that example, but its common in books which introduce the inductive method.

*It seems rather shaky to me, especially if it is granted that it is possible for legends to develop sooner (e.g., if there is no a priori reason to suppose it takes a generation or more for a legend to develop). There are so many variables that would have to be taken into account in such an integration, probably many we do not and cannot know because they are lost to history. I doubt such an inference could suffice as a substitute for combing through the available evidence. Christians are always telling us how unique Christianity is, but here it's lumped in with all kinds of other things. It could be another black swan. But you seem to agree with this.*

Historical endeavor has its limit, we might as well let it be what it is and in addition other types of arguments can be put forth for a "cumulative case." It isn't my position that historical evidence alone will suffice to prove the theistic God exists (I'm not an evidentialist). You don't seem very prepared to discuss the theistic arguments. I gave you a slew of classical theistic arguments earlier and you just poo poo'd them by saying the conclusion was false because it supposed a primacy of consciousness. But I've yet to see a formally notated argument (meaning not a paragraph full of words but numbered premises and a conclusion) for this "God can't exist because of primacy of consciousness' falsity" argument.

[November 29, 2008 4:20 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote: *What leads you to suspect this? What's different about today that facilitates legends developing (however this is taken to mean) quicker than in the past?*

David: "Communication technology would be a definite catalyst as I already mentioned."

Recall that 'development' indicated \*change\* in a story. Would communication technology as such be a catalyst in this? Or would it merely facilitate in the \*spread\* of the story? It seems the latter to me rather than the former. In the case of Bo's story, no communication technology was the catalyst in either Tee's dream about Bo or Amm's belief that she had seen Bo alive after she had died. I see one's worldview the primary catalyst of the belief that a person who had died was walking around after he/she had died. I see no reason why their stories could not have been told in other centuries, save for the fact that both included a bus. This could easily be replaced by a rickshaw for that matter.

I wrote: *So what would prevent someone (in any century) from offering non-historical narrative material (either oral or written) as historical within, say, a few weeks instead of a generation or more?*

David: "Depends on how many people were aware of the actual historical event who could falsify the story and possibly offer counter evidence."

So it's a numbers thing, is that it? What is the magic number of people who were aware of the actual historical event who could attest otherwise that, when reached, prevents a person from offering non-historical narrative material as historical in a relatively short time period?

I asked: *If the story began orally, how would one know, once it's been written down years later, whether it's changed or not?*

David: "This reminds me of when you insisted that since Paul didn't say he was quoting an oral tradition, we couldn't 'know' it was, despite the fact that multiple other Jewish sources quote oral tradition the same way."

I guess that's the best answer you could give to my question.

David: "Obviously at our point in history, we are not privy to the original oral traditions. We just have multiple written sources."

Right. And who knows how much embellishment, transformation, enlargement and change of story content could

have happened by the time the story was written down? We don't.

David: "At the time the sources were written, however, the oral tradition was still alive and well and thus falsifiable by any living eyewitnesses."

I've already addressed this possibility.

I wrote: *Yes, they could have, but in order to have the opportunity to disconfirm a story that has spiraled beyond the truth, they would have to learn about it first. That would be a minimum requirement. And even then, they might not make any attempt to correct the record; they could be indifferent to the falsehood, or they could think an attempt to correct the record would be futile, maybe even dangerous.*

David: "a) The Jews weren't exactly happy that Christ came and started sucking people out of their religion b) The Roman Empire (until around 300AD) would have loved to exterminate Christianity c) The Jews put a high value on the accuracy of oral tradition."

In other words, no one really knows.

I wrote: *Also, it's possible that someone who knew better did learn about the legend, did try to correct the record, and got squelched by history, allowing the legend to flourish as if no one ever challenged it. In this sense, the "people would have disconfirmed it" defense ultimately crumbles into an argument from ignorance. How do we know that there was no one trying to tell Paul that the post-resurrection appearances allegedly made by Jesus were actually cases of mistaken identity blown way out of proportion by followers blinded by their own zeal? If people blind themselves by their own zeal, they most likely wouldn't think twice about suppressing voices to the contrary.*

David: "Check out the Bible. The earliest counterargument offered by the Jews was that someone stole his body."

Perhaps the earliest \*recorded\* counterargument, but other counterarguments could easily have been suppressed, or simply not heard or considered.

I asked: *Is there evidence that Christian creeds were developed in 30 or 31 AD?*

David: "Yes."

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David: "Historical endeavor has its limit, we might as well let it be what it is and in addition other types of arguments can be put forth for a 'cumulative case'. It isn't my position that historical evidence alone will suffice to prove the theistic God exists (I'm not an evidentialist)."

I see. So, it's not something that reason can establish? Or do you think one needs to presuppose God's existence first in order to establish it?

David: "You don't seem very prepared to discuss the theistic arguments. I gave you a slew of classical theistic arguments earlier and you just poo poo'd them by saying the conclusion was false because it supposed a primacy of consciousness."

If it's the case that an argument ultimately rests on a false metaphysics, then that is sufficient reason by itself to reject its conclusion.

David: "But I've yet to see a formally notated argument (meaning not a paragraph full of words but numbered premises and a conclusion) for this 'God can't exist because of primacy of consciousness' falsity' argument."

Anton Thorn gives an argument for a conclusion that's quite close to the one you're looking for here: [The Argument From Existence](#). It's got numbered premises and everything.

Regards,  
Dawson

david said...

*Recall that 'development' indicated \*change\* in a story. Would communication technology as such be a catalyst in this? Or would it merely facilitate in the \*spread\* of the story? It seems the latter to me rather than the former.*

You asked what would have made it develop *quicker*. The speed of the development, not the content of the development would be affected by technology. The assumption is that given enough iterations of transmission, a story is going to pickup some legend material, like that game where you sit in a circle and pass a secret around until it returns to the original sender.

*I asked: If the story began orally, how would one know, once it's been written down years later, whether it's changed or not?*

What I meant by giving that example from our previous discussion, was that you seem to want deductive certainty in matters of historical inquiry.

*Right. And who knows how much embellishment, transformation, enlargement and change of story content could have happened by the time the story was written down? We don't.*

Historians can't know for sure, but they can formulate what the most probable conclusion is that best explains the data.

*Yes, they could have, but in order to have the opportunity to disconfirm a story that has spiraled beyond the truth, they would have to learn about it first. That would be a minimum requirement. And even then, they might not make any attempt to correct the record; they could be indifferent to the falsehood, or they could think an attempt to correct the record would be futile, maybe even dangerous.*

Given the rapid growth of early Christianity:

- a) people were around to falsify miracle accounts
- b) those people heard the miracle accounts (since the early growth occurred in the same region the actual events are alleged to have occurred)
- c) some of those people probably had a motive to falsify these claims

Do you think this an unreasonable assumption?

*Perhaps the earliest \*recorded\* counterargument, but other counterarguments could easily have been suppressed, or simply not heard or considered.*

Oh a juicy conspiracy theory eh? How in the world could these counterarguments have been suppressed? The Christian mafia? The early text tradition from this period confirms that the written tradition was quickly dispersed so that at the dawn of 200AD we have a very geographically dispersed text. As to a potentially ignored or unheard counterargument, may I again remind you that the Roman Empire and the Jewish authorities would have paid for some good evidence against Christianity.

*Is there evidence that Christian creeds were developed in 30 or 31 AD?*

The evidence presupposes a timeline from the Gospels, so there is no need to get into it. You disagree.

David: "Historical endeavor has its limit, we might as well let it be what it is and in addition other types of arguments can be put forth for a 'cumulative case'. It isn't my position that historical evidence alone will suffice to prove the theistic God exists (I'm not an evidentialist)."

*I see. So, it's not something that reason can establish? Or do you think one needs to presuppose God's existence first in order to establish it?*

I said *historical* evidence not reason. You aren't seeing if you think I was implying that reason cannot establish Christianity's truth claims. Belief formation is a tricky thing, and an argument that will persuade one person will

not compel another. Therefore, it is my position that classical deductive/inductive arguments in addition to historical evidence are sufficient to make a rational case for Christianity. Whether one accepts those or not is dependent on all sorts of factors, namely if the Holy Spirit chooses to regenerate them.

David: "You don't seem very prepared to discuss the theistic arguments. I gave you a slew of classical theistic arguments earlier and you just poo poo'd them by saying the conclusion was false because it supposed a primacy of consciousness."

*If it's the case that an argument ultimately rests on a false metaphysics, then that is sufficient reason by itself to reject its conclusion.*

You have not demonstrated the falsity of God's existence. If you think you have an argument for that I welcome it.

For my arguments to fail, either they must be invalid or one of the premises is false. Unless you show one of those, or successfully demonstrate your own argument (in which case one of us is wrong and we just can't figure out who) then you are still skirting the issue.

*Anton Thorn gives an argument for a conclusion that's quite close to the one you're looking for here: The Argument From Existence. It's got numbered premises and everything.*

I'll check it out, thanks.

[December 01, 2008 12:36 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

*I wrote: Recall that 'development' indicated \*change\* in a story. Would communication technology as such be a catalyst in this? Or would it merely facilitate in the \*spread\* of the story? It seems the latter to me rather than the former.*

David: "You asked what would have made it develop *quicker*."

Yes, and the keyword there is "develop." I'm going by the rendering you had given for this ("the idea is that within a generation one would not see much changing of the story"). I don't think technology changes stories; people do.

David: "The speed of the development, not the content of the development would be affected by technology."

You've not demonstrated this. One could easily argue that technology would preserve a story from change by replicating the same story without any development whatsoever, preserving a consistent product from beginning to end (such as from the first copy of a Stephen King novel off the press, to the last one). Technology does not change a story, people do, through their own choices and actions. This involves one's worldview, the philosophy guiding their choices and actions. Two people have a face-to-face discussion about a story they had both heard in the news could in one sitting easily morph it well beyond the facts. It's hard to see how someone whose worldview teaches that all men are liars would resist this.

David: "The assumption is that given enough iterations of transmission, a story is going to pickup some legend material, like that game where you sit in a circle and pass a secret around until it returns to the original sender."

The potential for this in oral communication is very high, not only because of motivation to change the story (such as to make it more impressive, as we see for instance in Matthew's reworking of Mark's model), but also as a result of human error, which cannot be so easily dismissed. Also, the kind of game you describe does not require modern technology, and the potential for modern technology to preserve the original story from alteration is high. A text message on a cell phone, for instance, can be forwarded over and over again. Recipients several generations removed would be receiving the same message that was originally sent out.

I asked: *If the story began orally, how would one know, once it's been written down years later, whether it's changed or not?*

David: "What I meant by giving that example from our previous discussion, was that you seem to want deductive



certainty in matters of historical inquiry.”

Not really (but it’s good that you admit that no one can be certain here). I just wanted to know how one could know, even on a probable basis, that a story written down years after its oral version originated, was true to the original. You listed a few selective guidelines, but other factors could easily impinge on those guidelines, assuming those guidelines were even invoked. The upshot is that no one really does know, even with a strong degree of probability (unless we selectively filter out unwanted factors).

In my view, since the content of religious belief is largely imaginary in nature, there’s a high probability that a story of religious nature will be altered as it is retold. We see this even in the written text of the New Testament. Look at how Matthew and Luke retell Mark’s story, the things they add (Matthew has an especial knack for exaggeration), the things they leave out, and how Matthew and Luke depart from one another where they elaborate beyond Mark’s model. It’s very illustrative of legend-building in process.

I asked: *Right. And who knows how much embellishment, transformation, enlargement and change of story content could have happened by the time the story was written down? We don’t.*

David: “Historians can’t know for sure, but they can formulate what the most probable conclusion is that best explains the data.”

Is this where the bias you told Breakerslion about a while back can come into play? Or are historians above this?

David: “Given the rapid growth of early Christianity: a) people were around to falsify miracle accounts b) those people heard the miracle accounts (since the early growth occurred in the same region the actual events are alleged to have occurred) c) some of those people probably had a motive to falsify these claims Do you think this an unreasonable assumption?”

Yes. I would not grant these assumptions off the bat. If the miracle stories were completely fictitious, and developed two or three decades after the time they supposedly occurred (for that matter, Paul never mentions in his letters any of the miracles ascribed to Jesus by the gospels), I wouldn’t assume that anyone was around to falsify them. For instance, say Habeeb was in Jerusalem in AD 30 when he was in his 20s. In his 50s someone asks Habeeb if he remembered a miracle-worker who was tried by Pilate, crucified until dead, and resurrected three days later. It would hardly be unusual for him to reply, “there were lots of miracle-workers back in the day, just as there are now, and lots of crucifixions, as there are now. I don’t remember anyone being raised from the dead, but I’ve heard stranger things.” I wouldn’t expect such a person to be able to “falsify” the miracle claim by presenting some knock-down, bowl-’em-over argument, especially if the gospels were legends. The culture of the time was full of stories about the supernatural, and people in general were more prone to accepting them in one way or another (as many of today’s Christians think the gods of Hinduism are actually existing demons and devils). Why would he be motivated to falsify such reports? Indeed, he was there in Jerusalem in 30 AD, never heard of Jesus or his disciples or his teachings, but 30 years later could himself have become a Christian, believing the legend as factual when he did learn of it. Supernaturalism was alive and well back then, and I would not expect people to launch into counter-arguments against stories of miracles and other hallmarks of mysticism.

I wrote> *Perhaps the earliest \*recorded\* counterargument, but other counterarguments could easily have been suppressed, or simply not heard or considered.*

David: “How in the world could these counterarguments have been suppressed? The Christian mafia?”

Easy; for instance, by not recording them, or disposing of any record of them if there were any. Or, simply not being aware of them, or ignoring them when one learns of them (like many Christians do today).

David: “The early text tradition from this period confirms that the written tradition was quickly dispersed so that at the dawn of 200AD we have a very geographically dispersed text.”

Dispersal of the text is indeed a factor to consider, but so is the variation within the textual tradition itself. A comparison of the gospels is quite telling, as I’ve indicated in earlier discussions with you. There’s also the state of the text as we have it (in its earliest form) and what changes may have occurred in the tradition prior to that point. It’s clear from Matthew’s and Luke’s reworking of Marcan material that evangelists considered the story open to revision, for they’ve certainly made revisions of their own. [Dr. Hector Avalos recently wrote:](#)

*The data for any Jesus all comes from the second century or later. So there is no way to determine what has*



*been added or subtracted from any portrayal of Jesus between ca. 30 CE, when he supposedly worked, and ca. 125-ca. 400 CE (the latter range is the dates of our actual manuscript data).*

If Avalos is correct (I don't know how I would refute what he says here), and it's reasonable to suppose that the evangelists considered the Jesus story open to revision (as Luke and Matthew demonstrate), then there is a strong possibility that the textual tradition did undergo fluctuations between their original inception and the earliest manuscripts to which we now have access.

I'd also note that the gospel of Mark is an interesting read in this respect. It repeatedly portrays the disciples who were hanging around Jesus, watching his miracles and listening to his teachings, as rather obtuse numbskulls. Mark frequently has his Jesus rebuke and correct his disciples because of their failure to understand him and failure to have faith in his caretaking power. And yet, Jesus still sends them out to preach and teach. Just what the hell were they teaching and preaching, if they were continually demonstrating themselves as simply too stupid to grasp Jesus' simple points? If we believe such portraits, one can only suppose that a lot of misinformation was being preached and taught as Christianity began to spread.

David: "As to a potentially ignored or unheard counterargument, may I again remind you that the Roman Empire and the Jewish authorities would have paid for some good evidence against Christianity."

Even if this is true, willingness to pay for something does not make that something available in the market at the time one is looking for it. Ever try to find something on e-Bay?

I asked: *Is there evidence that Christian creeds were developed in 30 or 31 AD?*

David: "The evidence presupposes a timeline from the Gospels, so there is no need to get into it. You disagree."

Are there statements in the NT documenting the formulation of creeds in 30 or 31 AD?

David: "Historical endeavor has its limit, we might as well let it be what it is and in addition other types of arguments can be put forth for a 'cumulative case'. It isn't my position that historical evidence alone will suffice to prove the theistic God exists (I'm not an evidentialist)."

I asked: *I see. So, it's not something that reason can establish? Or do you think one needs to presuppose God's existence first in order to establish it?*

David: "I said *historical* evidence not reason. You aren't seeing if you think I was implying that reason cannot establish Christianity's truth claims."

In order for reason to establish a conclusion, that conclusion would at minimum need to conform to the primacy of existence (for the same reason that one would not expect to establish a conclusion by saying "I want it to be true"). But Christianity's teachings do not conform to the primacy of existence, so reason would not be able to establish it. This is why historically the churchmen have ultimately resorted to appeals to faith, to supernaturalism, to some inner feeling, etc.

I've seen attempts by Christians to cohere their religious worldview with the primacy of existence. Toner and Parrish have produced the best attempts I've seen, and they're riddled with numerous problems. A major one is failure to understand the issue of metaphysical primacy, which is pretty bad. I hope eventually to post my own reviews of their arguments.

David: "Belief formation is a tricky thing, and an argument that will persuade one person will not compel another."

I agree. But reason is not merely "argument." A Muslim can persuade another Muslim that Jihad is inevitable and that he should be willing to strap a bomb around his chest and blow up the Stockton Street bus. That may be "argument," but it's not *reason*.

David: "Therefore, it is my position that classical deductive/inductive arguments in addition to historical evidence are sufficient to make a rational case for Christianity."

Yeah, I've seen a lot of attempts at this (hundreds, in fact), and in the end I can only wonder what their proponents think their starting point is. Of course, [we've already seen what can happen at that point](#).

David: "Whether one accepts those or not is dependent on all sorts of factors, namely if the Holy Spirit chooses to regenerate them."

See what I mean? Ultimately there's going to be some anti-rational appeal in there, e.g., appeal to the holy spirit. May the Force be with you.

David: "You don't seem very prepared to discuss the theistic arguments. I gave you a slew of classical theistic arguments earlier and you just poo poo'd them by saying the conclusion was false because it supposed a primacy of consciousness."

I wrote: *If it's the case that an argument ultimately rests on a false metaphysics, then that is sufficient reason by itself to reject its conclusion.*

David: "You have not demonstrated the falsity of God's existence. If you think you have an argument for that I welcome it."

There's no onus to prove that the non-existent does not exist, David.

David: "For my arguments to fail, either they must be invalid or one of the premises is false. Unless you show one of those, or successfully demonstrate your own argument (in which case one of us is wrong and we just can't figure out who) then you are still skirting the issue."

If a premise of an argument ultimately rests on a false metaphysics, then this is sufficient reason to reject its conclusion. This is simply a matter of consistency with the preconditions of knowledge, chief among them being the primacy of existence. It's not "skirting" any issue; it's slashing off invalid ideas at their root.

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 01, 2008 8:39 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

David: "The speed of the development, not the content of the development would be affected by technology."

*You've not demonstrated this. One could easily argue that technology would preserve a story from change by replicating the same story without any development whatsoever, preserving a consistent product from beginning to end (such as from the first copy of a Stephen King novel off the press, to the last one).*

Just take the cell phone for example. Does it offer anything to the detriment of legend development? No. Just the same as oral tradition, except now you're not face to face and you are potentially more susceptible to external influences on the message (background noise, signal drops, volume too low). This occurs every day, but cell phones can only be turned up so high as opposed to asking someone to speak up more. I have had many phone conversations where I thought that I comprehended the message but later found I had missed a detail...of course this phenomenon would usually involve a female and a disagreement. haha just kidding

A printing press is not the kind of technology I had in mind here.

*Technology does not change a story, people do, through their own choices and actions. This involves one's worldview, the philosophy guiding their choices and actions. Two people have a face-to-face discussion about a story they had both heard in the news could in one sitting easily morph it well beyond the facts.*

People do not *only* change stories through choices and actions. They also do it because of external factors, one of which includes their limited cognition. The ability to accurately recall and transmit a story - especially in modern culture where we rely on computers, calculators, and phone calendars - has significantly decreased (plenty of case studies back this up). Therefore, add in some catalyst like a cell phone and you're simply speeding up inevitable process. People do a lot of morphing without realizing it. For instance, there is the phenomenon of a person substituting his own synonyms into the story (since he won't remember them exactly), and then the next person interprets his synonyms slightly differently according to their own style of language.

Jim - Betty: "Bobby was driving pretty fast"  
Betty - Sue: "Bobby was flying down the road"  
Sue - Shane: "Bobby was rolling at break neck speed"

Especially in our culture where idioms, colloquial speech, and personalized language are so prevalent, this phenomenon is simply unavoidable.

*You listed a few selective guidelines, but other factors could easily impinge on those guidelines, assuming those guidelines were even invoked. The upshot is that no one really does know, even with a strong degree of probability (unless we selectively filter out unwanted factors).*

What factors? How do they impinge? How do you know that "no one really does know?"

David: "Historians can't know for sure, but they can formulate what the most probable conclusion is that best explains the data."

*Is this where the bias you told Breakerslion about a while back can come into play? Or are historians above this?*

The whole purpose of the canons of historiography is to provide checks and balances against bias! Have you ever taken a course in historical studies? You really should, it would answer a lot of your questions.

David: "Given the rapid growth of early Christianity: a) people were around to falsify miracle accounts b) those people heard the miracle accounts (since the early growth occurred in the same region the actual events are alleged to have occurred) c) some of those people probably had a motive to falsify these claims Do you think this an unreasonable assumption?"

*The culture of the time was full of stories about the supernatural, and people in general were more prone to accepting them in one way or another (as many of today's Christians think the gods of Hinduism are actually existing demons and devils). Why would he be motivated to falsify such reports? Indeed, he was there in Jerusalem in 30 AD, never heard of Jesus or his disciples or his teachings, but 30 years later could himself have become a Christian, believing the legend as factual when he did learn of it. Supernaturalism was alive and well back then, and I would not expect people to launch into counter-arguments against stories of miracles and other hallmarks of mysticism.*

You've obviously forgotten about what the earliest Jewish authorities tried to argue regarding the empty tomb. Their motive is clear, and in addition it shows that your expectations about people back then are inaccurate.

*Dispersal of the text is indeed a factor to consider, but so is the variation within the textual tradition itself. A comparison of the gospels is quite telling, as I've indicated in earlier discussions with you.*

Firstly, the rapid dispersion eliminates the ability for an organized group to suppress or destroy them. Secondly, you impose your own biased standards on ancient narrative material, so "quite telling" is a bit self-referentially obvious.

*I'd also note that the gospel of Mark is an interesting read in this respect. It repeatedly portrays the disciples who were hanging around Jesus, watching his miracles and listening to his teachings, as rather obtuse numbskulls. Mark frequently has his Jesus rebuke and correct his disciples because of their failure to understand him and failure to have faith in his caretaking power. And yet, Jesus still sends them out to preach and teach. Just what the hell were they teaching and preaching, if they were continually demonstrating themselves as simply too stupid to grasp Jesus' simple points? If we believe such portraits, one can only suppose that a lot of misinformation was being preached and taught as Christianity began to spread.*

You missed the part about Jesus promising to send the "Helper."

*Are there statements in the NT documenting the formulation of creeds in 30 or 31 AD?*

Is this where you start saying "well they didn't say 30 AD so we can't know?" Spare me.

*In order for reason to establish a conclusion, that conclusion would at minimum need to conform to the primacy of existence (for the same reason that one would not expect to establish a conclusion by saying "I want it to be true"). But Christianity's teachings do not conform to the primacy of existence, so reason would not be able to*

*establish it. This is why historically the churchmen have ultimately resorted to appeals to faith, to supernaturalism, to some inner feeling, etc.*

Right, because your Objectivist axioms presuppose God can't exist that means its not reasonable for anyone to believe in God. Sounds pretty cultish to me. :-)

I've yet to see it demonstrated how God and His creation violate the primacy of existence. Oh and I'll get to that article this weekend, it looks pretty good.

*Yeah, I've seen a lot of attempts at this (hundreds, in fact), and in the end I can only wonder what their proponents think their starting point is. Of course, we've already seen what can happen at that point.*

It's not clear what you mean.

David: "Whether one accepts those or not is dependent on all sorts of factors, namely if the Holy Spirit chooses to regenerate them."

*See what I mean? Ultimately there's going to be some anti-rational appeal in there, e.g., appeal to the holy spirit. May the Force be with you.*

Whether something *is* rational and whether someone can believe it are two different things.

David: "You have not demonstrated the falsity of God's existence. If you think you have an argument for that I welcome it."

*There's no onus to prove that the non-existent does not exist, David.*

Oh so if we assume existence exists and God is non-existence then that settles it...what a cop out. You have yet to explain how God's existence is metaphysically false...I think I know where you'll go. You'll probably say that since existence depends on His consciousness then it is primacy of consciousness....but that really doesn't demonstrate anything. If God exists then He is an existent. He just exists like all the other existents that make up existence. So I really don't see the problem.

[December 05, 2008 2:08 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "The speed of the development, not the content of the development would be affected by technology."

I responded: *You've not demonstrated this. One could easily argue that technology would preserve a story from change by replicating the same story without any development whatsoever, preserving a consistent product from beginning to end (such as from the first copy of a Stephen King novel off the press, to the last one).*

David: "Just take the cell phone for example. Does it offer anything to the detriment of legend development? No. Just the same as oral tradition, except now you're not face to face and you are potentially more susceptible to external influences on the message (background noise, signal drops, volume too low). This occurs every day, but cell phones can only be turned up so high as opposed to asking someone to speak up more. I have had many phone conversations where I thought that I comprehended the message but later found I had missed a detail...of course this phenomenon would usually involve a female and a disagreement. haha just kidding "

I don't think that a phone conversation between two persons is fundamentally different from a conversation between two persons face to face. There may, as you suggest, be cause for distraction from the content of what is being spoken. But one can be distracted in face-to-face conversation as well.

David: "A printing press is not the kind of technology I had in mind here."

A printing press may not be what you had in mind, but it is technology, and many forms of technological reproduction of verbal content exist. The internet is obviously one. A person logging onto the internet and visiting this blog will see the same exact images you see when you visit the same blog. A mimeograph or photocopying machine will reproduce the same content without adding or subtracting or revising it. A printing press will not alter the ending of a novel. Etc.

I wrote: *Technology does not change a story, people do, through their own choices and actions. This involves one's worldview, the philosophy guiding their choices and actions. Two people have a face-to-face discussion about a story they had both heard in the news could in one sitting easily morph it well beyond the facts.*

David: "People do not *only* change stories through choices and actions. They also do it because of external factors, one of which includes their limited cognition."

Since, as far as I know, there's no such thing as "unlimited cognition," what you mention here would be an ever-present factor, regardless of historical era. So you've identified another factor which can lead to changes in the content of a story which is delivered verbally from person to person.

I wrote: *You listed a few selective guidelines, but other factors could easily impinge on those guidelines, assuming those guidelines were even invoked. The upshot is that no one really does know, even with a strong degree of probability (unless we selectively filter out unwanted factors).*

David: "What factors? How do they impinge?"

There could be all kinds, including personal motivation to embellish a story. We see this in Matthew's and Luke's treatment of Mark's model. This is up to the judgment of those who are retelling the story. In the book of Mark, for instance, various pericopes follow one another in no apparently historical order. There are in many cases no indications of where or when the pericope is supposedly taking place. Anecdotes seem to be arranged thematically (sometimes related only by a common word), not chronologically, such that what we're reading in Mark is not actual history, but didactic summaries cast in narrative form. There are numerous cases where Mathew and Luke edit out Marcan material, probably because in their judgment it did not make the best sense or seemed imprudent in some way. The result is that the story develops and evolves, and in two different directions in the case of Matthew and Luke.

David: "How do you know that 'no one really does know'?"

Your own admissions suggest this.

David: "Historians can't know for sure, but they can formulate what the most probable conclusion it that best explains the data."

I asked: *Is this where the bias you told Breakerslion about a while back can come into play? Or are historians above this?*

David: "The whole purpose of the canons of historiography is to provide checks and balances against bias!"

I guess you think historians are above this then. Is that right?

David: "Have you ever taken a course in historical studies? You really should, it would answer a lot of your questions."

I've taken many courses in all kinds of subjects, David. But I'm aging and increasingly overstretched by various factors in my life, as you will be probably one day. Also, I enjoy giving you a few challenges here and there.

David: "Given the rapid growth of early Christianity: a)people were around to falsify miracle accounts b)those people heard the miracle accounts (since the early growth occurred in the same region the actual events are alleged to have occurred) c)some of those people probably had a motive to falsify these claims Do you think this an unreasonable assumption?"

I wrote: *The culture of the time was full of stories about the supernatural, and people in general were more prone to accepting them in one way or another (as many of today's Christians think the gods of Hinduism are actually existing demons and devils). Why would he be motivated to falsify such reports? Indeed, he was there in Jerusalem in 30 AD, never heard of Jesus or his disciples or his teachings, but 30 years later could himself have become a Christian, believing the legend as factual when he did learn of it. Supernaturalism was alive and well back then, and I would not expect people to launch into counter-arguments against stories of miracles and other hallmarks of mysticism.*

David: "You've obviously forgotten about what the earliest Jewish authorities tried to argue regarding the empty tomb. Their motive is clear, and in addition it shows that your expectations about people back then are inaccurate."

Were the reports of "the earliest Jewish authorities" and their argument regarding the empty tomb, from contemporary Jewish antagonists? Or is this what we read about in the (Christian) gospels themselves? Is there anything from a Jewish antagonist's hand at the time of the alleged empty tomb attempting to dispute it? Or is the story of such disputers found only later, such as when the gospels were written (by Christians)?

I wrote: *Dispersal of the text is indeed a factor to consider, but so is the variation within the textual tradition itself. A comparison of the gospels is quite telling, as I've indicated in earlier discussions with you.*

David: "Firstly, the rapid dispersion eliminates the ability for an organized group to suppress or destroy them."

Destroy what? Counter-arguments which may have been raised against early Christianity's claims? A rapid dispersion could easily forestall the publication of those counter-arguments as part of the dispersed text, simply because they missed the boat. To reach the masses, they would need to find some other means of publication, which may not have happened in the first place, and if it did, such publication could have been later consigned to the flames as a result of institutional censorship.

David: "Secondly, you impose your own biased standards on ancient narrative material, so 'quite telling' is a bit self-referentially obvious."

Well, if noticing differences and fluctuations in the treatment of the same story constitutes a "biased standard," I don't see anything wrong with it. That is essentially what I have in mind: significant ("telling") differences between Mark's model and the versions which Matthew and Luke produced in their versions of the same stories.

I wrote: *I'd also note that the gospel of Mark is an interesting read in this respect. It repeatedly portrays the disciples who were hanging around Jesus, watching his miracles and listening to his teachings, as rather obtuse numbskulls. Mark frequently has his Jesus rebuke and correct his disciples because of their failure to understand him and failure to have faith in his caretaking power. And yet, Jesus still sends them out to preach and teach. Just what the hell were they teaching and preaching, if they were continually demonstrating themselves as simply too stupid to grasp Jesus' simple points? If we believe such portraits, one can only suppose that a lot of misinformation was being preached and taught as Christianity began to spread.*

David: "You missed the part about Jesus promising to send the 'Helper'."

I didn't miss it, I was saving for when you thought it was important to introduce into the discussion. Two different things. I'm actually surprised, David, with you of all people, apparently thinking it's time to bring this element into the mix. That's fine, it saves me some work. ;) So I'll just ask: If the disciples' demonstrable numbskullery was intended to be overcome by the presence of a supernatural "helper" all along, why did Jesus go through the trouble of trying to teach and then correct his disciples in the first place? Why not forego all the wasteful effort in trying to teach a group of idiots who never seem to get it (while Jesus' adversaries get it immediately, and repeatedly), and just send them out and let the "Helper" do its trick? Perhaps an immediate reply to this question would be: So that Christians today could learn from the master's rebukes. But isn't the same "Helper" available to Christians today? Let me ask you, David: Do you think the "Helper" is helping you in our ongoing discussions?

Again, I just wonder what Jesus' immediate disciples were teaching other people when they were sent out to teach and preach. Clearly according to Mark, they did not understand things, and repeatedly so. The story implies that their understanding was important, but if a "Helper" is going to shore up the difference between a failure to understand a message and the actual content of the message itself, why is understanding important in the first place?

I asked: *Are there statements in the NT documenting the formulation of creeds in 30 or 31 AD?*

David: "Is this where you start saying 'well they didn't say 30 AD so we can't know'? Spare me."

I take this response as a roundabout way of admitting that there aren't any statements in the NT documenting the formulation of creeds in 30 or 31 AD. Am I wrong to do so?

I wrote: *In order for reason to establish a conclusion, that conclusion would at minimum need to conform to the primacy of existence (for the same reason that one would not expect to establish a conclusion by saying "I want it to be true"). But Christianity's teachings do not conform to the primacy of existence, so reason would not be able to establish it. This is why historically the churchmen have ultimately resorted to appeals to faith, to supernaturalism, to some inner feeling, etc.*

David: "Right, because your Objectivist axioms presuppose God can't exist that means its not reasonable for anyone to believe in God. Sounds pretty cultish to me. :-)"

Where do the Objectivist axioms "presuppose God can't exist"? It's not a presupposition of the axioms; the axioms do not presuppose prior truths. If the axioms have necessary but deleterious implications for god-belief, well, that's not my problem.

David: "I've yet to see it demonstrated how God and His creation violate the primacy of existence. Oh and I'll get to that article this weekend, it looks pretty good."

Let me know what you think. I'm open to ways of improving Thorn's basic argument.

I wrote: *Yeah, I've seen a lot of attempts at this (hundreds, in fact), and in the end I can only wonder what their proponents think their starting point is. Of course, [we've already seen what can happen at that point](#).*

David: "It's not clear what you mean."

Essentially, what I mean is that the theist is unclear on just what his starting point might be, and I suspect that this is because he himself doesn't really know what it is. Typically when the theist states what he apparently considers to be his starting point, it assumes a broad spectrum of prior assertions, some true, some not true. By the way, did you ever read my interaction with Tennant's piece?

David: "Whether one accepts those or not is dependent on all sorts of factors, namely if the Holy Spirit chooses to regenerate them."

I wrote: *See what I mean? Ultimately there's going to be some anti-rational appeal in there, e.g., appeal to the holy spirit. May the Force be with you.*

David: "Whether something is rational and whether someone can believe it are two different things."

Many people, particularly the religious, demonstrate a noteworthy ability to believe (or to claim to believe), and indeed, the irrationality of the content of their belief does not stop them. But if a supernatural entity takes over, how can one resist it? If "the Holy Spirit" chose to "regenerate" me, isn't that supposed to be "irresistible"? And if it's "irresistible," isn't that akin to forcing someone at gunpoint? Even worse, it seems. Of course, on my view, faith and force are corollaries, and both are incompatible with reason.

David: "You have not demonstrated the falsity of God's existence. If you think you have an argument for that I welcome it."

I wrote: *There's no onus to prove that the non-existent does not exist, David.*

David: "Oh so if we assume existence exists and God is non-existence then that settles it...what a cop out."

Are you suggesting that we have an onus to prove that the non-existent does not exist? I never said or assumed that "God is non-existence." The non-existence of something that does not exist is not a starting point; we do not begin by denying or negating, but by affirming. But if something doesn't exist, it doesn't exist; there's no onus to prove its non-existence, as if it "could exist" if someone fails to produce such a proof. For that matter, you've not demonstrated that your god *does* exist. You can claim it exists, you can say its existence is inferred, you can pretend that it is real. But I've not even seen an explanation of how I can reliably distinguish between what you call "God" and what you may merely be imagining. I'm sure you realize that there's a fundamental difference between the imaginary and the real, no?

David: "You have yet to explain how God's existence is metaphysically false...I think I know where you'll go. You'll probably say that since existence depends on His consciousness then it is primacy of consciousness....but that really doesn't demonstrate anything. If God exists then He is an existent. He just exists like all the other



existents that make up existence. So I really don't see the problem.”

How much of my blog have you read?

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 05, 2008 9:49 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

David: “The speed of the development, not the content of the development would be affected by technology.”

Dawson: You’ve not demonstrated this. One could easily argue that technology would preserve a story from change by replicating the same story without any development whatsoever, preserving a consistent product from beginning to end (such as from the first copy of a Stephen King novel off the press, to the last one).

David: “Just take the cell phone for example. Does it offer anything to the detriment of legend development? No. Just the same as oral tradition, except now you're not face to face and you are potentially more susceptible to external influences on the message (background noise, signal drops, volume too low). This occurs every day, but cell phones can only be turned up so high as opposed to asking someone to speak up more. I have had many phone conversations where I thought that I comprehended the message but later found I had missed a detail...of course this phenomenon would usually involve a female and a disagreement. haha just kidding “

*I don't think that a phone conversation between two persons is fundamentally different from a conversation between two persons face to face. There may, as you suggest, be cause for distraction from the content of what is being spoken. But one can be distracted in face-to-face conversation as well.*

You're being dense here Dawson. Obviously a cell phone makes for speedier message transmittal than face to face conversations because of the removal of the distance factor. In the old world, you had to either go visit them or send them a letter right? That could take days or months to accomplish. Now you just pick up the phone.

David: “A printing press is not the kind of technology I had in mind here.”

*A printing press may not be what you had in mind, but it is technology, and many forms of technological reproduction of verbal content exist. The internet is obviously one. A person logging onto the internet and visiting this blog will see the same exact images you see when you visit the same blog. A mimeograph or photocopying machine will reproduce the same content without adding or subtracting or revising it. A printing press will not alter the ending of a novel. Etc.*

I have already specified that I'm referring to communication technology but you can continue to ignore this if you wish.

I wrote: Technology does not change a story, people do, through their own choices and actions. This involves one's worldview, the philosophy guiding their choices and actions. Two people have a face-to-face discussion about a story they had both heard in the news could in one sitting easily morph it well beyond the facts.

David: “People do not only change stories through choices and actions. They also do it because of external factors, one of which includes their limited cognition.”

*Since, as far as I know, there's no such thing as “unlimited cognition,” what you mention here would be an ever-present factor, regardless of historical era. So you've identified another factor which can lead to changes in the content of a story which is delivered verbally from person to person.*

Again, you are ignoring things I've already stated. In the ancient world people were more apt to remember things because they didn't have the conveniences of Microsoft Word, calendars, laptops, and Outlook reminders.

I wrote: You listed a few selective guidelines, but other factors could easily impinge on those guidelines, assuming those guidelines were even invoked. The upshot is that no one really does know, even with a strong degree of probability (unless we selectively filter out unwanted factors).

David: “What factors? How do they impinge?”

*There could be all kinds, including personal motivation to embellish a story. We see this in Matthew's and Luke's treatment of Mark's model. This is up to the judgment of those who are retelling the story. In the book of Mark, for instance, various pericopes follow one another in no apparently historical order. There are in many cases no indications of where or when the pericope is supposedly taking place. Anecdotes seem to be arranged thematically (sometimes related only by a common word), not chronologically, such that what we're reading in Mark is not actual history, but didactic summaries cast in narrative form. There are numerous cases where Mathew and Luke edit out Marcan material, probably because in their judgment it did not make the best sense or seemed imprudent in some way. The result is that the story develops and evolves, and in two different directions in the case of Matthew and Luke.*

a) You apparently don't study much in that literary genre if you're surprised that they aren't writing chronologically or if you think that is evidence of embellishment.

b) My guidelines were general but you are now referring to specific instances in the Gospels. Why?

David: "How do you know that 'no one really does know'?"

*Your own admissions suggest this.*

Your response suggests you can't answer the question. Oh unless you're equating knowledge with deductive certainty, which of course I've already pointed out is a common blunder when approaching historical matters.

David: "Historians can't know for sure, but they can formulate what the most probable conclusion it that best explains the data."

I asked: Is this where the bias you told Breakerslion about a while back can come into play? Or are historians above this?

David: "The whole purpose of the canons of historiography is to provide checks and balances against bias!"

*Guess you think historians are above this then. Is that right?*

Historiography was developed specifically to reduce bias, just as the scientific method was developed for removing the influence of extraneous variables in experiments. No person is above error in any profession, which is why each field has its on canons of methodology to counteract error. I'm assuming you understand this, but then again your last question seems to indicate otherwise...unless you were just being facetious.

*Were the reports of "the earliest Jewish authorities" and their argument regarding the empty tomb, from contemporary Jewish antagonists? Or is this what we read about in the (Christian) gospels themselves? Is there anything from a Jewish antagonist's hand at the time of the alleged empty tomb attempting to dispute it? Or is the story of such disputers found only later, such as when the gospels were written (by Christians)?*

Right, anything in the Bible is false...forgot about that. Yup, the Christians made it all up just so later historians would have room for a theory....more conspiracy! :-)

*Destroy what? Counter-arguments which may have been raised against early Christianity's claims? A rapid dispersion could easily forestall the publication of those counter-arguments as part of the dispersed text, simply because they missed the boat. To reach the masses, they would need to find some other means of publication, which may not have happened in the first place, and if it did, such publication could have been later consigned to the flames as a result of institutional censorship.*

This sounds like another "its possible" argument. So maybe all the juicy evidence against Christ just missed the boat? Maybe Jesus fathered some aliens too. What institution is censoring and how did they gather up all the manuscripts? In this period scriptoriums were cranking out all sorts of interesting material. The orthodox canon was not the only thing being copied, and indeed until a century later no such canon was widely acknowledged. So this "other means" of publication seems to presume some Christian publication center, which is totally non-historical.

*Well, if noticing differences and fluctuations in the treatment of the same story constitutes a "biased standard," I don't see anything wrong with it. That is essentially what I have in mind: significant ("telling") differences between Mark's model and the versions which Matthew and Luke produced in their versions of the same stories.*

If you studied other works in the literary genre I think you might be less surprised at what you find between the narratives.

*I didn't miss it, I was saving for when you thought it was important to introduce into the discussion. Two different things. I'm actually surprised, David, with you of all people, apparently thinking it's time to bring this element into the mix. That's fine, it saves me some work. ;) So I'll just ask: If the disciples' demonstrable numbskullery was intended to be overcome by the presence of a supernatural "helper" all along, why did Jesus go through the trouble of trying to teach and then correct his disciples in the first place? Why not forego all the wasteful effort in trying to teach a group of idiots who never seem to get it (while Jesus' adversaries get it immediately, and repeatedly), and just send them out and let the "Helper" do its trick? Perhaps an immediate reply to this question would be: So that Christians today could learn from the master's rebukes. But isn't the same "Helper" available to Christians today? Let me ask you, David: Do you think the "Helper" is helping you in our ongoing discussions?*

First I doubt that you were saving any such information, as your first comment tried to deliberately reach a conclusion in the absence of that information, e.g. when you said, "If we believe such portraits, one can only suppose that a lot of misinformation was being preached and taught as Christianity began to spread."

Secondly, you are now trying to argue with your own ideas about what the Holy Spirit and Christ's discipleship would have looked like. Guess what? That is irrelevant to what the Bible says, which is what you were initially trying to argue from. So in short, this is just a red herring. Thanks for saving it but they don't keep well so its best to throw them out quickly. ?

*Again, I just wonder what Jesus' immediate disciples were teaching other people when they were sent out to teach and preach. Clearly according to Mark, they did not understand things, and repeatedly so. The story implies that their understanding was important, but if a "Helper" is going to shore up the difference between a failure to understand a message and the actual content of the message itself, why is understanding important in the first place?*

You didn't do much theological work as a Christian did you? I don't feel the need to completely define the Biblical role of the Holy Spirit in the early church and then also in the believer today in this combox. In short, read the book of Acts. In long, Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology book is very good.

*I take this response as a roundabout way of admitting that there aren't any statements in the NT documenting the formulation of creeds in 30 or 31 AD. Am I wrong to do so?*

I don't have time to explain everything to you. Just ignore all the scholarship in this area and assume that since the NT documents don't explicate it, we can't know....just like Paul's statement in 1 Cor 15.

I wrote: Yeah, I've seen a lot of attempts at this (hundreds, in fact), and in the end I can only wonder what their proponents think their starting point is. Of course, we've already seen what can happen at that point.

David: "It's not clear what you mean."

*Essentially, what I mean is that the theist is unclear on just what his starting point might be, and I suspect that this is because he himself doesn't really know what it is. Typically when the theist states what he apparently considers to be his starting point, it assumes a broad spectrum of prior assertions, some true, some not true. By the way, did you ever read my interaction with Tennant's piece?*

I think your definition of "starting point" and most theistic foundationalists' definition are not the same, which is why you keep insisting on a chronological priority of propositions...which is why Bnonn titled his piece the "Chronological Priority Objection Revisited." I read most of it, but I got tired of wading through the rhetoric. I'll probably revisit it as some point. Does he know about your response? I'm not sure he reads your blog regularly.

*Many people, particularly the religious, demonstrate a noteworthy ability to believe (or to claim to believe), and indeed, the irrationality of the content of their belief does not stop them. But if a supernatural entity takes over, how can one resist it? If "the Holy Spirit" chose to "regenerate" me, isn't that supposed to be "irresistible"? And if it's "irresistible," isn't that akin to forcing someone at gunpoint? Even worse, it seems. Of course, on my view, faith and force are corollaries, and both are incompatible with reason.*

I don't think anyone would object to a fireman carrying them out of a burning building.

As to the epistemic warrant of experience. Imagine you go to trial for a murder you did not commit. You know where you were that night, and that you didn't do it; however the prosecution has a stack of evidence that sufficiently demonstrates your motive, place, and participation in the crime. Now, would you be called irrational for believing you didn't commit the murder even in the face of evidence that you did? Of course, I don't think the evidence is stacked against Christianity but certainly the experience I've had plays into the equation...particularly if I find certain premises compelling or not. This is why atheists aren't compelled by Christian arguments (in general) and vice versa.

David: "You have not demonstrated the falsity of God's existence. If you think you have an argument for that I welcome it."

I wrote: There's no onus to prove that the non-existent does not exist, David.

David: "Oh so if we assume existence exists and God is non-existence then that settles it...what a cop out."

*Are you suggesting that we have an onus to prove that the non-existent does not exist? I never said or assumed that "God is non-existence." The non-existence of something that does not exist is not a starting point; we do not begin by denying or negating, but by affirming. But if something doesn't exist, it doesn't exist; there's no onus to prove its non-existence, as if it "could exist" if someone fails to produce such a proof. For that matter, you've not demonstrated that your god does exist. You can claim it exists, you can say its existence is inferred, you can pretend that it is real. But I've not even seen an explanation of how I can reliably distinguish between what you call "God" and what you may merely be imagining. I'm sure you realize that there's a fundamental difference between the imaginary and the real, no?*

"I never said or assumed that God is non-existence."

"But if something doesn't exist, it doesn't exist; there's no onus to prove its non-existence,

It is clear to me you have assumed this.

David: "You have yet to explain how God's existence is metaphysically false...I think I know where you'll go. You'll probably say that since existence depends on His consciousness then it is primacy of consciousness....but that really doesn't demonstrate anything. If God exists then He is an existent. He just exists like all the other existents that make up existence. So I really don't see the problem."

*How much of my blog have you read?*

Not much, but I'm slowly working backwards. The articles tend to be very lengthy and laden with excessive rhetoric. For a Christian this means cognitive dissonance and a decreased ability to evaluate the arguments. So I find it hard to reconstruct your arguments because there are so many words and many of them are vitriolic. For this reason, I prefer less rhetoric and more brevity, and specifically enumerated arguments.

[December 06, 2008 3:03 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Returning to our discussion of Objectivism and the metaphysical implications of its axioms:

"... the basic metaphysical issue that lies at the root of any system of philosophy [is] the primacy of existence or the primacy of consciousness... The primacy of existence (of reality) is the axiom that existence exists, i.e., that the universe exists independent of consciousness (of any consciousness), that things are what they are, that they possess a specific nature, an identity. The epistemological corollary is the axiom that consciousness is the faculty of perceiving that which exists - and that man gains knowledge of reality by looking outward. The rejection of these axioms represents a reversal: the primacy of consciousness - the notion that the universe has no independent existence, that it is the product of a consciousness (either human or divine or both)."

*Philosophy: Who Needs It*, (New York: Signet, 1984), pp. 23-34.

Now to me that clearly sets out from the start to define God out of existence. Before we continue I just want to make sure you agree?

You had previously stated:

*Where do the Objectivist axioms “presuppose God can’t exist”? It’s not a presupposition of the axioms; the axioms do not presuppose prior truths.*

Now perhaps you are just quibbling over the semantics of the word presupposition? Perhaps “assume” is a better word.

[December 06, 2008 6:27 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: “You’re being dense here Dawson. Obviously a cell phone makes for speedier message transmittal than face to face conversations because of the removal of the distance factor. In the old world, you had to either go visit them or send them a letter right? That could take days or months to accomplish. Now you just pick up the phone.”

I must be dense then. I just don’t see how this is going to facilitate a story to change quicker. Suppose my co-worker calls me and tells me how a mutual friend of ours started flying around the office on a broomstick. I’d think he was engaging in metaphor. If he meant this literally, I’d probably ask a number of questions, but I’d be inclined to disbelieve it, even if it were communicated to me over the phone.

Regardless, you think that technology would have the tendency to accelerate the development of a legend (i.e., change in story beyond its historical factuality), and you’ve had plenty of opportunity to make your case. I’m not convinced by what you’ve stated so far that a legend could not develop as quickly without the kind of technology we have today. I have given an example from my own travels where several individuals whom I’ve personally met have claimed to have seen someone alive after committing suicide, and I’ve seen no good reason to suppose that the development of their story (if it developed at all) was prompted or facilitated by modern technology.

Also, for communication to take “days and months to accomplish” does not translate into a full generation or more, which is what I’ve been told repeatedly by Christians that it takes for a legend to develop. You’ll recall, for instance, how Geisler and Turek, in their now infamous passage, wrote of 1 Cor. 15:3-8, “There’s no possible way that such testimony could describe a legend, because it goes right back to the time and place of the event itself.” By the same token, I see no reason, even after our lengthy discussion on the differences between 1st century Palestine and today, why this kind of reasoning should not apply to the story about Bo’s post-suicide appearances. “There’s no reason that Tee’s and Amm’s testimonies about Bo’s post-mortem appearances could describe a legend, because they go right back to the time and place of the event itself!” Indeed, while Christians have a hard time making good on the claim that the testimony in 1 Cor. 15:3-8 dates back to 30 AD, I know for a fact that the testimonies about Bo’s post-mortem appearances originated within less than a week after her death, because I heard about them myself at that time.

So you can call me dense, David. I’m fine with that. It’s probably your own frustration showing through.

David: “I have already specified that I’m referring to communication technology but you can continue to ignore this if you wish.”

I see print media as a form of communication. I guess I’m just dense?

David: “In the ancient world people were more apt to remember things because they didn’t have the conveniences of Microsoft Word, calendars, laptops, and Outlook reminders.”

If you say so, David. I remember all kinds of things, and I’ve used MS Word and Outlook. I’ve rarely relied on these things, and even when I have, I was typically on top of things already without their prompts. I doubt I’m atypical in this regard, but maybe I am. I set my alarm for 5:00 AM everyday, but I consistently wake up three or four minutes before this. My wife continually tells me that I don’t need an alarm clock, but I set it every night before I go to sleep anyway... I’m just stubborn as well as dense now I guess.

Now when you say that “in the ancient world people were more apt to remember things,” are you suggesting this about everyone back then? Are you suggesting that they were more apt to remember things accurately? Which people specifically? No one specifically, right? We don’t even know who most early Christians were, but here I’m supposed to believe some very broad generalities about the fitness of their memories. I guess I’m just not as

credulous as you are, David.

David: "a) You apparently don't study much in that literary genre if you're surprised that they aren't writing chronologically or if you think that is evidence of embellishment."

I've studied plenty of the literary genre, and in different languages and eras to boot. But I'm often told that the gospels are authentic histories of Jesus' ministry and passion. It's not a matter of being \*surprised\* that the earliest gospel in particular seems to lack a chronology for the episodes of Jesus' ministry (however, there is a chronology when we get to the passion). It's simply an observation, and it's germane to our discussion. Within Mark itself there are telltale signs that what we are reading is not history, but religious propaganda cast in narrative form.

David: "How do you know that 'no one really does know'?"

I asked: *Your own admissions suggest this.*

David: "Your response suggests you can't answer the question."

No, I just don't have time to go fishing back through our previous discussions to quote your own statements.

David: "Historiography was developed specifically to reduce bias, just as the scientific method was developed for removing the influence of extraneous variables in experiments."

So when historians like Gerd Ludemann and Richard Carrier deny the historicity of the resurrection, for instance, are they being guided by the canons of historiography, or by some insidious bias which clouds their thinking and they cannot overcome?

David: "No person is above error in any profession, which is why each field has its own canons of methodology to counteract error. I'm assuming you understand this, but then again your last question seems to indicate otherwise...unless you were just being facetious."

Well, I can understand the need for guidelines and safeguards of this type on the basis of my worldview, which recognizes the fundamental distinction between the objects of cognition and the process of cognition. But if I were to ignore this fundamental distinction, and blur these components together, I'd either not see the sense to it all, or I'd have to compartmentalize.

I asked: *Were the reports of "the earliest Jewish authorities" and their argument regarding the empty tomb, from contemporary Jewish antagonists? Or is this what we read about in the (Christian) gospels themselves? Is there anything from a Jewish antagonist's hand at the time of the alleged empty tomb attempting to dispute it? Or is the story of such disputers found only later, such as when the gospels were written (by Christians)?*

David: "Right, anything in the Bible is false...forgot about that. Yup, the Christians made it all up just so later historians would have room for a theory....more conspiracy! :-)"

Whew! I'm glad you're above rhetoric, David!

I wrote: *Well, if noticing differences and fluctuations in the treatment of the same story constitutes a "biased standard," I don't see anything wrong with it. That is essentially what I have in mind: significant ("telling") differences between Mark's model and the versions which Matthew and Luke produced in their versions of the same stories.*

David: "If you studied other works in the literary genre I think you might be less surprised at what you find between the narratives."

I have studied other works in the literary genre, and I'm not surprised by what I find there, since most do not purport to be histories. Something that is openly admitted to be fictitious is not expected to be accepted as historical narrative. But this doesn't help in the case of a document like Mark, which is supposed to relate authentic history. Or do you not think so?

I wrote: *I didn't miss it, I was saving for when you thought it was important to introduce into the discussion. Two different things. I'm actually surprised, David, with you of all people, apparently thinking it's time to bring*

*this element into the mix. That's fine, it saves me some work. ;) So I'll just ask: If the disciples' demonstrable numbskullery was intended to be overcome by the presence of a supernatural "helper" all along, why did Jesus go through the trouble of trying to teach and then correct his disciples in the first place? Why not forego all the wasteful effort in trying to teach a group of idiots who never seem to get it (while Jesus' adversaries get it immediately, and repeatedly), and just send them out and let the "Helper" do its trick? Perhaps an immediate reply to this question would be: So that Christians today could learn from the master's rebukes. But isn't the same "Helper" available to Christians today? Let me ask you, David: Do you think the "Helper" is helping you in our ongoing discussions?*

David: "First I doubt that you were saving any such information, as your first comment tried to deliberately reach a conclusion in the absence of that information, e.g. when you said, 'If we believe such portraits, one can only suppose that a lot of misinformation was being preached and taught as Christianity began to spread'."

Oh come on, David? Don't you know when someone's egging you on? I'm always aware that someone who professes belief in the supernatural can at any time whip out his supernaturalism in order to get himself out of a pinch. I did not expect you to do so quite so soon though.

David: "Secondly, you are now trying to argue with your own ideas about what the Holy Spirit and Christ's discipleship would have looked like. Guess what? That is irrelevant to what the Bible says, which is what you were initially trying to argue from. So in short, this is just a red herring. Thanks for saving it but they don't keep well so its best to throw them out quickly."

I'm not the one who introduced the idea of a supernatural "helper," David. Remember? You did this. Besides, what I offered in the above quote is not an argument, but a series of questions. I see that you have not addressed them. Don't you think the "Helper" is helping you out?

*I wrote: Again, I just wonder what Jesus' immediate disciples were teaching other people when they were sent out to teach and preach. Clearly according to Mark, they did not understand things, and repeatedly so. The story implies that their understanding was important, but if a "Helper" is going to shore up the difference between a failure to understand a message and the actual content of the message itself, why is understanding important in the first place?*

David: "You didn't do much theological work as a Christian did you?"

Well, why would I need to? The "Helper" is there to help, right? How much "theological work" did the 12 disciples do?

David: "I don't feel the need to completely define the Biblical role of the Holy Spirit in the early church and then also in the believer today in this combobox."

Okay. What do you feel?

David: "In short, read the book of Acts. In long, Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology book is very good."

I've read the book of Acts. You'll probably not be surprised to find that I'm in agreement with Wells when he writes:

**At every turn in Acts, the Christian mission is promoted by supernatural forces, whether by the Spirit, or by angels, visions or directives from the exalted Jesus, sometimes making the human agents little more than puppets. (*Can We Trust the New Testament?* p. 83)**

David: "I don't have time to explain everything to you."

Nor I time to explain everything to you.

David: "Just ignore all the scholarship in this area and assume that since the NT documents don't explicate it, we can't know....just like Paul's statement in 1 Cor 15."

Well, okay, if that's your preference....

David: "I think your definition of 'starting point' and most theistic foundationalists' definition are not the same,"



Well, to speak to this, I explained what I mean by 'starting point' in my blog. It's not entirely clear to me what Tennant or other theists mean by it. They clearly do not have in mind baseline recognitions which are conceptually irreducible. But this leaves open what they have in mind, and this is typically left vague and unexplained, and even when it is explained to whatever degree an explanation may be given, it varies from theist to theist.

David: "which is why you keep insisting on a chronological priority of propositions..."

This statement right here tells me either that you have not read my blog, or did not understand it very well. For I speak to this charge directly.

David: "I read most of it, but I got tired of wading through the rhetoric."

Ah, you're a lightweight, David. Where's your stamina? Where's your grit? ;)

David: "I don't think anyone would object to a fireman carrying them out of a burning building."

I think you're right. But a person being carried out of a burning building, whether by a fireman or anyone else, is not at all analogous to an invisible magic being inviting itself into a person's mind and commandeering his thought process. The burning building reply can be used to rationalize a wide assortment of instances of initiating the use of force. Saddam Hussein could rationalize his invasion of Kuwait in 1990 on the claim that it's in the best interest of Kuwaitis that his forces invade and take over, even if they don't know it.

David: "As to the epistemic warrant of experience. Imagine you go to trial for a murder you did not commit. You know where you were that night, and that you didn't do it; however the prosecution has a stack of evidence that sufficiently demonstrates your motive, place, and participation in the crime. Now, would you be called irrational for believing you didn't commit the murder even in the face of evidence that you did? Of course, I don't think the evidence is stacked against Christianity but certainly the experience I've had plays into the equation...particularly if I find certain premises compelling or not. This is why atheists aren't compelled by Christian arguments (in general) and vice versa."

Yes, I understand the importance of personal experience in the formation of one's view of reality. Inestimably important to this, in my view, is being able to distinguish between the real and the imaginary. A person will always, if he so desires, be able to imagine an invisible supernatural being "back of" the things he sees and touches in his day to day experience. This is likely to alter subsequent identifications in his day to day experience in a self-reinforcing manner if he does not learn how to distinguish between the real and the imaginary.

I asked: *How much of my blog have you read?*

David: "Not much, but I'm slowly working backwards. The articles tend to be very lengthy and laden with excessive rhetoric. For a Christian this means cognitive dissonance and a decreased ability to evaluate the arguments. So I find it hard to reconstruct your arguments because there are so many words and many of them are vitriolic. For this reason, I prefer less rhetoric and more brevity, and specifically enumerated arguments."

Well, my blog must be a complete disappointment for you. But something keeps you coming back to me time and time again. Have you figured out what that is? Is it your "Helper"? Is it something else?

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 07, 2008 12:21 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

"... the basic metaphysical issue that lies at the root of any system of philosophy [is] the primacy of existence or the primacy of consciousness... The primacy of existence (of reality) is the axiom that existence exists, i.e., that the universe exists independent of consciousness (of any consciousness), that things are what they are, that they possess a specific nature, an identity. The epistemological corollary is the axiom that consciousness is the faculty of perceiving that which exists - and that man gains knowledge of reality by looking outward. The

rejection of these axioms represents a reversal: the primacy of consciousness - the notion that the universe has no independent existence, that it is the product of a consciousness (either human or divine or both)."  
*Philosophy: Who Needs It*, (New York: Signet, 1984), pp. 23-34.

David: "Now to me that clearly sets out from the start to define God out of existence."

Is that because, as a theist, you think that the universe does not exist independent of consciousness?

David: "Before we continue I just want to make sure you agree?"

Do I agree that Rand set out in the quoted passage expressly to "define God out of existence"? No, I do not think this is the case. I don't think this is the best-worded summation of the issue (like many of Rand's expository essays, the one from which this was quoted was written in haste, in order to meet publication deadlines), but I don't think it's defining "God" out of existence at all. I would agree that it has clear deleterious implications for theism, but that's not the same thing as defining something out of existence.

I wrote: *Where do the Objectivist axioms "presuppose God can't exist"? It's not a presupposition of the axioms; the axioms do not presuppose prior truths.*

David: "Now perhaps you are just quibbling over the semantics of the word presupposition? Perhaps 'assume' is a better word."

Not quibbling here, David. The axioms neither presuppose nor assume prior truths. They can't, because they're the most fundamental of all truths. There are no truths which logically precede them. So again, I would not agree with the assessment that the Objectivist axioms "presuppose God can't exist." This would be a later recognition.

Hope that helps!

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 07, 2008 12:23 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

*I must be dense then. I just don't see how this is going to facilitate a story to change quicker.*

Again, you seem to be missing my point. The story is going to change because humans inevitably change things. I think there is some interaction between message and medium, but I'm willing to grant you that the effect is minimal. The cell phone allows the change to happen faster because it propagates the message more rapidly and across a greater possible distance. A message via cell phone can be transmitted all across the world to all sorts of people in a matter of minutes, while a face to face approach would take years to accomplish the same quantity and geographical coverage. Think about this angle: if you had to travel 100 miles to deliver a message you might contemplate it more and probably remember details more vividly. After all you made a special trip to deliver this message. But if you just need to pick up a phone, then it is less crucial and thus easier to allow cognitive blunders to slip in. How many times do we pick up the phone without giving much prior thought to our approaching interaction? Studies have shown that a definite effect of cell phone usage is a decreased planning ahead, because people always assume they can reach each other on the drop of a hat. Anyways, I could go on for days about technology because I work in that sector and also am interested in the philosophy of technology use.

You may be interested in current [philosophical discussions](#) going on about medium and its development.

Also, for communication to take "days and months to accomplish" does not translate into a full generation or more, which is what I've been told repeatedly by Christians that it takes for a legend to develop.

David: "I have already specified that I'm referring to communication technology but you can continue to ignore this if you wish."

*I see print media as a form of communication. I guess I'm just dense?*

Well I was an Information Technology major so I guess I should be careful not to narrowly define a term without

explicitly doing so. You could use the term that way to include the printing press. In the very broad sense, anything that manipulates or communicates information could be called communication technology. However, many would restrict the usage to refer to the medium itself - i.e. the paper that comes out of the printing press.

*Now when you say that “in the ancient world people were more apt to remember things,” are you suggesting this about everyone back then? Are you suggesting that they were more apt to remember things accurately? Which people specifically? No one specifically, right? We don’t even know who most early Christians were, but here I’m supposed to believe some very broad generalities about the fitness of their memories. I guess I’m just not as credulous as you are, David.*

**Especially** the Jewish people had incredible memories, and often learned the entire Torah by rote. Rabbinical students were often referred to as trusty cisterns which never lost a drop of their teacher’s instruction. This is a well documented fact, and I think the data is out there for you, probably even available by a few Google attempts.

David: “a) You apparently don’t study much in that literary genre if you’re surprised that they aren’t writing chronologically or if you think that is evidence of embellishment.”

*I’ve studied plenty of the literary genre, and in different languages and eras to boot.*

Very interesting. What literary genre do you refer to, and in what languages? One of my biggest frustrations is languages. I barely know Greek, and my French from high school is horrific.

David: “Historiography was developed specifically to reduce bias, just as the scientific method was developed for removing the influence of extraneous variables in experiments.”

*So when historians like Gerd Ludemann and Richard Carrier deny the historicity of the resurrection, for instance, are they being guided by the canons of historiography, or by some insidious bias which clouds their thinking and they cannot overcome?*

When historians disagree on how to model the data, there is certainly a subjective element to it. Especially since they deal with one time events in the past, while scientists have all day to sit around and rig repeatable experiments. In addition to historiography, there are peer reviews which help to identify bias.

A historian’s pre-commitments to certain metaphysical systems will certainly have an effect on what theories he finds most probable. For instance, Bart Ehrman thinks that by definition a miracle is the least probable event, therefore a historian can never conclude that the resurrection is probable. William Lane Craig has a very complicated rendition of Baye’s Theorem that he uses to counter Ehrman’s argument. Their debate is available here: <http://www.brianauten.com/Apologetics/CraigEhrmanDebate2006.mp3>. Also the transcript if you prefer reading and seeing the probability calculation: <http://www.holycross.edu/departments/crec/website/resurrection-debate-transcript.pdf>

*I have studied other works in the literary genre, and I’m not surprised by what I find there, since most do not purport to be histories. Something that is openly admitted to be fictitious is not expected to be accepted as historical narrative. But this doesn’t help in the case of a document like Mark, which is supposed to relate authentic history. Or do you not think so?*

Obviously you are operating on a different assumption about Mark’s literary genre? If not historical biography, what is it? Certainly there is some midrashic influence. I think James Crossley is the best non-Christian scholar in this area.

*Oh come on, David? Don’t you know when someone’s egging you on? I’m always aware that someone who professes belief in the supernatural can at any time whip out his supernaturalism in order to get himself out of a pinch. I did not expect you to do so quite so soon though.*

I think you just don’t want to admit that your argument was easily refuted.

*I’m not the one who introduced the idea of a supernatural “helper,” David. Remember? You did this. Besides, what I offered in the above quote is not an argument, but a series of questions. I see that you have not addressed them. Don’t you think the “Helper” is helping you out?*

The Holy Spirit doesn't just sit around and help believers out. That would be a rather shallow understanding of pneumatology. And I brought up the Helper **because** you made a bad argument! You tried to basically say "oh look how dumb the disciples were when Jesus were around, how did they teach anyone anything?"

If you had known of the entire purpose Jesus sent them the Holy Spirit upon his ascension then it is puzzling to me why you made the statement you did...which by the way you can state something as a question but that doesn't mean the underlying assumptions can't be examined and critiqued.

*Okay. What do you feel?*

Honestly it's hard for me to believe you were a Christian.

David: "Just ignore all the scholarship in this area and assume that since the NT documents don't explicate it, we can't know....just like Paul's statement in 1 Cor 15."

*Well, okay, if that's your preference....*

You have repeatedly shown this to be your method. Do you deny this?

*Ah, you're a lightweight, David. Where's your stamina? Where's your grit? ;)*

Guess I need to upgrade my coffee to high octane! :)

*Well, my blog must be a complete disappointment for you. But something keeps you coming back to me time and time again. Have you figured out what that is? Is it your "Helper"? Is it something else?*

I think you're right, I like being challenged :)

[December 07, 2008 1:18 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

*Is that because, as a theist, you think that the universe does not exist independent of consciousness?*

There has been no clear definition of what kind of dependence we're talking about.

Must an Objectivist accept that the universe always "just existed" without any cause? In other words, is it normally held by Objectivists that the universe always existed? And no this isn't the "duh, I dunno God done it" argument. :-)

[December 07, 2008 9:05 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "The story is going to change because humans inevitably change things."

Okay, this observation is sufficient for me to consider this matter settled. Humans tend to change things for a variety of reasons, whether or not they have modern technology at their disposal. Modern technology can avail itself in distributing those changes over broader geographical distances than in the past, and it can also avail itself in distributing a uniform product globally (as with a printing press). In the end, however, it's people who do the changing of any story. In thinking about the matter more, I'm more and more of the opinion that it's the frequency of touching the story (tell it to one person counts as one touch, tell it to another counts as a second, and so on) which provides the opportunity for a story to change. Tell it once, and it is what it is. Tell it a second time, and differences - most likely minor if one is seeking to be faithful to the original - are apt to be introduced. If a second person retells the story, I'd think there's an increased probability that the story will incur more changes, however subtle.

I wrote: *Now when you say that "in the ancient world people were more apt to remember things," are you suggesting this about everyone back then? Are you suggesting that they were more apt to remember things accurately? Which people specifically? No one specifically, right? We don't even know who most early Christians were, but here I'm supposed to believe some very broad generalities about the fitness of their memories. I*

*guess I'm just not as credulous as you are, David.*

David: "Especially the Jewish people had incredible memories, and often learned the entire Torah by rote. Rabbinical students were often referred to as trusty cisterns which never lost a drop of their teacher's instruction. This is a well documented fact, and I think the data is out there for you, probably even available by a few Google attempts."

Yes, I realize this is the case, with writings which the Jewish people had already accepted as canonical, with so-called "Scripture." But with the early Christians, there was no Christian scripture yet. Paul makes it clear in his writings that much of his "knowledge" of Jesus really came from OT texts (the prophets, Psalms, etc.), which he interpreted according to the new messianism. He called this "revelation." Paul certainly does not recite sermons which the gospels put into Jesus' mouth, even though this would have been very helpful to his attempts to settle many issues which came up at his budding churches. I don't think it would be very easy to reconstruct the oral traditions which preceded Paul. Indeed, what were Paul's churches originally taught when they were founded? Were they taught, for instance, that Jesus was born of a virgin? Were they taught that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist? Were they taught that Jesus was crucified under the sanction of Pontius Pilate? Were they taught that Jesus left an empty tomb behind? Going by the written documentation, these appear to be later traditions. Paul never mentions them, even in passing, and so far as I know there is no record of what the churches in Paul's ministry to the gentiles were originally taught.

*I wrote: I have studied other works in the literary genre, and I'm not surprised by what I find there, since most do not purport to be histories. Something that is openly admitted to be fictitious is not expected to be accepted as historical narrative. But this doesn't help in the case of a document like Mark, which is supposed to relate authentic history. Or do you not think so?*

David: "Obviously you are operating on a different assumption about Mark's literary genre? If not historical biography, what is it? Certainly there is some midrashic influence. I think James Crossley is the best non-Christian scholar in this area."

I certainly do not think what we read in the gospel of Mark is genuine history. I even suspect that its author(s) did not intend it to be history, but rather religious allegory. I think midrash played an extensive role in the development of early Christian beliefs, and Paul's heavy reliance on OT themes and quotations supports this.

David: "The Holy Spirit doesn't just sit around and help believers out. That would be a rather shallow understanding of pneumatology. And I brought up the Helper because you made a bad argument! You tried to basically say 'oh look how dumb the disciples were when Jesus were around, how did they teach anyone anything?'"

Actually, what I had inquired on is *what* the disciples were teaching and preaching when the story makes it clear that they had a very poor understanding of their master's teaching, as demonstrated by Jesus' frequent rebukes and corrections. It's true, I don't know what the Holy Spirit does. In fact, I don't think there is any Holy Spirit to begin with. But I do know that people can claim anything they want about something that is only imaginary. I saw this a lot myself in church. The "brothers and sisters" were frequently claiming to be "moved by the Spirit" to do all sorts of things, things that an ordinary person could easily be motivated to do on his own. In a religious setting, it may be difficult to resist the temptation to attribute one's own motivations to a supernatural being's guiding hand.

As for my "understanding of pneumatology," perhaps I'm just an ignorant dolt and I get everything Christian wrong (like Jesus' disciples). I'm just going by what I've learned in the New Testament (it's supposed to comfort and assist the faithful in their time of need, isn't it?) and from other Christians (many apologists make appeals to the Holy Spirit as the key to shoring up deficiencies in their theistic arguments, for example). But there is a problem with your response to my question by bringing up the "Helper" as the solution to the disciples' persisting daftness. I'll elaborate below.

David: "If you had known of the entire purpose Jesus sent them the Holy Spirit upon his ascension then it is puzzling to me why you made the statement you did...which by the way you can state something as a question but that doesn't mean the underlying assumptions can't be examined and critiqued."

I was reading the passage I quoted from Wells in my last comment (the passage where he points out how Acts essentially "make[s] the human agents little more than puppets." The two sentences preceding the portion which I had quoted in my earlier comment read as follows:

The apostles are, then, to remain in Jerusalem until they have been “baptized with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 1:4-5) - a baptism which follows at Pentecost in the next chapter. The Holy Spirit is necessary for their preaching, and they must wait for it before they start work. (*Can We Trust the New Testament?* p. 83)

I realized when I read this that the “Helper” was not yet distributed to Jesus’ disciples when he sent them out teaching and preaching in the gospel of Mark (6:7). Your own statement (“Jesus sent them the Holy Spirit *upon his ascension*”) only supports my point here. We’re talking about Jesus’ disciples well before his ascension and consequent sending of the Holy Spirit. Now Mark does say (6:7) that Jesus “gave them power over unclean spirits.” If this is to say that they were given the Holy Spirit at this point, why would they need to tarry for it after Jesus’ ascension in Acts 2? If it’s not supposed to indicate that they were given the Holy Spirit, then I would surmise that the power given to the disciples at this point was restricted to just what it says: “power over unclean spirits,” which is open to the imagination as to what this really entails. It also says (6:12) that the disciples “went out, and preached that men should repent,” but it’s doubtful that all they would have said in their preaching was “you should repent.” The power that Jesus gave to them does not seem to be a power to promulgate sound Christian teaching, but “power over unclean spirits.” The accounts are vague and highly generalized, giving no detail of what may have taken place, giving no indication of what exactly these disciples would have taught in their evangelizing sorties, and raising the question of what they could possibly have taught when the narrative portrays the disciples as continually getting Jesus’ teaching wrong, necessitating his corrections and rebukes.

Wrede, in his *The Messianic Secret*, concludes that “Disciples of the kind presented to here by Mark are not real figures - disciples who never become any wiser about Jesus after all the wonderful things they see about him - confidants who have no confidence in him and who stand over against him fearfully as before an uncanny enigma.” (p. 103)

Your earlier response suggested that they would have had a “Helper” (i.e., the Holy Spirit) along to tidy things up for them. But if the Holy Spirit was not issued until after Jesus’ ascension (cf. Acts 1-2), then this response seems implausible. I know, I know, I’m just clueless when it comes to pneumatology.

I asked: *Okay. What do you feel?*

David: “Honestly it’s hard for me to believe you were a Christian.”

Believe me, David, when I say that I wish it never happened. I make a terrible Christian, and it’s a most embarrassing part of my past. I simply do not do well with people telling me what I’m supposed to believe and with trying to sustain imaginative pretensions about reality. I didn’t last very long, I’m glad to say. Then again, there’s a wide variety of Christianities out there, in case you didn’t know this. My pastor was very well aware of this. In the end my honesty got the better of me: my conscience couldn’t tolerate the pretense any longer, and I had to get out. It was the best decision I had made up to that point in my life.

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 07, 2008 11:30 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: “There has been no clear definition of what kind of dependence we’re talking about.”

How many different kinds of dependence are you aware of?

David: “Must an Objectivist accept that the universe always ‘just existed’ without any cause? In other words, is it normally held by Objectivists that the universe always existed?”

I wouldn’t say Objectivists “must” accept anything, since it’s not a matter of compulsion or duty. It’s simply the only rational position. See my [Basic Contra-Theism](#) for some thoughts on this.

David: “And no this isn’t the ‘duh, I dunno God done it’ argument. :-)”

You asked a question, you did not offer an argument. But had you asked “Where did the universe come from?”



many people have offered essentially that very response.

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 07, 2008 11:32 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

*I certainly do not think what we read in the gospel of Mark is genuine history. I even suspect that its author(s) did not intend it to be history, but rather religious allegory. I think midrash played an extensive role in the development of early Christian beliefs, and Paul's heavy reliance on OT themes and quotations supports this.*

What other works have you read in this literary genre? Oh and I'm still curious what languages you read?

*Actually, what I had inquired on is what the disciples were teaching and preaching when the story makes it clear that they had a very poor understanding of their master's teaching, as demonstrated by Jesus' frequent rebukes and corrections. It's true, I don't know what the Holy Spirit does. In fact, I don't think there is any Holy Spirit to begin with. But I do know that people can claim anything they want about something that is only imaginary. I saw this a lot myself in church. The "brothers and sisters" were frequently claiming to be "moved by the Spirit" to do all sorts of things, things that an ordinary person could easily be motivated to do on his own. In a religious setting, it may be difficult to resist the temptation to attribute one's own motivations to a supernatural being's guiding hand.*

I think the consistent Christian must study what the Bible teaches about the Holy Spirit's work (pneumatology) before they attribute things to Him. Of course we both know that isn't the norm in most churches, and I agree with your assessment of the temptation to attribute things to God in church. It is the "spiritual" thing to do.

*I realized when I read this that the "Helper" was not yet distributed to Jesus' disciples when he sent them out teaching and preaching in the gospel of Mark (6:7). Your own statement ("Jesus sent them the Holy Spirit upon his ascension") only supports my point here. We're talking about Jesus' disciples well before his ascension and consequent sending of the Holy Spirit. Now Mark does say (6:7) that Jesus "gave them power over unclean spirits." If this is to say that they were given the Holy Spirit at this point, why would they need to tarry for it after Jesus' ascension in Acts 2? If it's not supposed to indicate that they were given the Holy Spirit, then I would surmise that the power given to the disciples at this point was restricted to just what it says: "power over unclean spirits," which is open to the imagination as to what this really entails. It also says (6:12) that the disciples "went out, and preached that men should repent," but it's doubtful that all they would have said in their preaching was "you should repent." The power that Jesus gave to them does not seem to be a power to promulgate sound Christian teaching, but "power over unclean spirits." The accounts are vague and highly generalized, giving no detail of what may have taken place, giving no indication of what exactly these disciples would have taught in their evangelizing sorties, and raising the question of what they could possibly have taught when the narrative portrays the disciples as continually getting Jesus' teaching wrong, necessitating his corrections and rebukes.*

I think you're making the same old mistake again by trying to move from "the text doesn't explicitly say x" to "therefore x"

The text doesn't explicitly say what kind of assistance the Holy Spirit gave to the pre-ascension disciples' teachings. The Pentecost was certainly meant to do more than provide a literal "dumping of the Spirit." It isn't as if we have an exact time that the Holy Spirit started working with the disciples, and part of letting them be confused may have been to show them their need for assistance later (humility).

The text does explicitly say that they "went out, and preached that men should repent." Therefore, I don't see where you doubt is that they stuck to the plan. Maybe they were like the guys who hold signs today! (just kidding).

*How many different kinds of dependence are you aware of?*

Historians speak of strong and weak dependence.

Causation is divided into necessary and sufficient conditions.



Mathematically, When the value of one variable depends on the value of another variable, there is a dependence between them.

[December 08, 2008 10:04 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "I think the consistent Christian must study what the Bible teaches about the Holy Spirit's work (pneumatology) before they attribute things to Him. Of course we both know that isn't the norm in most churches, and I agree with your assessment of the temptation to attribute things to God in church. It is the 'spiritual' thing to do."

I too would think that study of what the bible teaches about the Holy Spirit's work would be in order for the attentive believer. But what the bible teaches about the Holy Spirit's work tends to be quite vague and open to wide latitudes of interpretations, perhaps even conflicting. As you yourself stated, "The text doesn't explicitly say what kind of assistance the Holy Spirit gave to the pre-ascension disciples' teachings." If we look to the book of Acts as our guide to what the bible teaches about the Holy Spirit's work, I'd think we'd get the impression that it is a very active force which choreographs not only the movements of the faithful, but also everything else that's happening all around. One can certainly imagine that an invisible supernatural being is doing this, and taking Acts' stories seriously would encourage such active imagination of invisible forces "behind the scenes." So I can understand today's churchgoers supposing that the impulses they experience for certain actions are attributable to the Holy Spirit.

Paul simply lists "the fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22; they are: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." Of course, I already have all these, and I certainly make no claim to possessing the Holy Spirit (and I doubt you would think I have it too).

The gospel according to John makes it clear that Jesus has to go away before the Holy Spirit comes. This document equates "the Holy Spirit" with "the Comforter": "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). Jesus is then portrayed to explain to his disciples: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7). If Jesus' disciples in Mark were supposed to be guided by the Holy Spirit in their evangelizing sorties, it seems that the author of Mark had a different understanding of when the Holy Spirit would be available to the disciples.

In the quoted passage, John makes it clear that the Holy Spirit "shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." This does not seem to be among the list of "fruits" which Paul gives in Galatians 5:22. Do you believe you've been "baptized by the Holy Spirit" and that it is teaching you "all things"? When I asked you this before, whether or not you think the Holy Spirit is helping you out, you replied that "The Holy Spirit doesn't just sit around and help believers out. That would be a rather shallow understanding of pneumatology." But when passages such as the one I quoted from John suggest that the Holy Spirit is going to guide believers, and examples from the book of Acts depict it doing so, why is the belief that the Holy Spirit helping a believer constitute "a shallow understanding of pneumatology"? In Mark's account, we see Jesus warning his disciples of persecutions to come, saying "when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13:11). Do you think it would be wrong for believers today to suppose the Holy Spirit is speaking through them? If so, why?

David: "It isn't as if we have an exact time that the Holy Spirit started working with the disciples, and part of letting them be confused may have been to show them their need for assistance later (humility)."

But curiously Jesus' enemies seem to understand him perfectly well. For instance, when Jesus speaks to the scribes in parables (Mark 3:22-27), there's no hint in the account that they were confused or did not understand what he was saying. The "common people" who listened to Jesus' teachings "heard him gladly" (Mark 12:37), which is not what one would expect if they were perplexed by teaching in unintelligible riddles. In his *Clumsy Construction in Mark's Gospel*, JC Meagher notes: "the crowds see and hear quite well, while the inner circle has difficulties" (p. 87), which is pretty much the opposite of Jesus' intended policy, announced at 4:10-12: "And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things

are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them." The gospel would have us believe a rather implausible situation here I'd say.

David: "The text does explicitly say that they "went out, and preached that men should repent." Therefore, I don't see where you doubt is that they stuck to the plan. Maybe they were like the guys who hold signs today! (just kidding)."

The "doubt" arises from the fact that the accounts of the disciples in Mark repeatedly portray them as failing to understand Jesus' teachings. Following Wrede and R?is?nen, Wells summarizes the problems:

At [Mark] 4:11-12 the disciples are said to have been given the secret of the kingdom of God, in contrast to outsiders, who are not meant to understand Jesus's teaching and whom he does not want to save... But Jesus at once goes on to complain of their incomprehension (4:13), and has to give them additional instruction (4:14-20, 34). Nevertheless, they still lack faith (4:40) and do not understand who he is (4:41). He sends them out to exorcise (6:7), and on their mission they not only do this, but also preach a doctrine of repentance, cure the sick, and teach (6:12-13, 30). When they return, they still do not understand what they can expect of him (6:35-37) and do not understand his feeding of the 5,000 because their hearts were "hardened" (6:51)... The situation here is that "straightway" after the feeding they are in difficulty, rowing on the lake against a strong wind. He sees their distress, walks on the water towards them, tells them not to be afraid, and enters their boat, whereupon "the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves; for they understood not concerning the loaves." Wrede commented ([*The Messianic Secret*,] p. 104): this can only mean that, in spite of this earlier incident, they still had not noticed that he possessed miraculous powers. Matthew realized that such obtuseness is not to be believed, and so the parallel passage in his gospel makes them acknowledge Jesus as "truly the Son of God" (14:33). Matthew did not notice that this emendation makes Peter's later 'confession' that Jesus is "the Son of the living God" no longer the unexpected stroke of divinely inspired genius that Jesus there declares it to be (Mt. 16:16-18). In this instance as so often, adapting a document so as to dispose of one problem simply creates another. (*The Jesus Legend*, pp. 117-118).

I asked: *How many different kinds of dependence are you aware of?*

David: "Historians speak of strong and weak dependence. Causation is divided into necessary and sufficient conditions. Mathematically, When the value of one variable depends on the value of another variable, there is a dependence between them."

The dependence which Objectivism has in mind in describing the primacy of consciousness as involving the notion or assumption that existence or some object "depends" on consciousness, is any kind of *metaphysical* dependence. See my [The Primacy of Existence: A Validation](#); hopefully it will help clarify some things for you?

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 08, 2008 5:18 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Thought you would be interested to see Steven Carr's brief interaction with Craig Blomberg and Darrel Bock (New Testament historians):

<http://blog.bible.org/primetimejesus/content/resurrection-probably-reported-same-year-it-happened>

[December 09, 2008 7:39 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

*The gospel according to John makes it clear that Jesus has to go away before the Holy Spirit comes. This document equates "the Holy Spirit" with "the Comforter": "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). Jesus is then portrayed to explain to his disciples: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7). If Jesus' disciples in Mark were supposed to be guided*

*by the Holy Spirit in their evangelizing sorties, it seems that the author of Mark had a different understanding of when the Holy Spirit would be available to the disciples.*

The second person of the Trinity speaks of "sending" the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is always "available" since He is omnipresent. The whole idea of sending has more theological significance than as if Jesus was literally pulling some switch and releasing the Spirit. You can read about the Spirit in the Old Testament too.

Jesus is speaking of the future Pentecost event when the Spirit would officially indwell the church. This doesn't mean the Spirit just sat around doing nothing before that.

*In the quoted passage, John makes it clear that the Holy Spirit "shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." This does not seem to be among the list of "fruits" which Paul gives in Galatians 5:22.*

You are correct.

*Do you believe you've been "baptized by the Holy Spirit" and that it is teaching you "all things"?*

Do you believe I am one of the twelve disciples to whom that passage is addressed? Of course not.

*Do you think it would be wrong for believers today to suppose the Holy Spirit is speaking through them? If so, why?*

The Holy Spirit "illuminates" the Scripture which He already "inspired." Yes, if they thought the Spirit was saying something new through them that would be wrong, since the very Bible they claim to believe claims authority over God's words to man. This doesn't mean the Spirit doesn't support and assist the believe who is trying to understand and apply the Bible (illumination).

*The "common people" who listened to Jesus' teachings "heard him gladly" (Mark 12:37), which is not what one would expect if they were perplexed by teaching in unintelligible riddles.*

So we're judging by the reaction of the masses? Do you really think "heard him gladly" is equivalent to "understood him fully"?

*The dependence which Objectivism has in mind in describing the primacy of consciousness as involving the notion or assumption that existence or some object "depends" on consciousness, is any kind of metaphysical dependence. See my The Primacy of Existence: A Validation; hopefully it will help clarify some things for you?*

It clarifies what I already suspected and you had denied: the axiom defines God out of existence.

[December 09, 2008 8:22 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "The second person of the Trinity speaks of "sending" the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is always "available" since He is omnipresent. The whole idea of sending has more theological significance than as if Jesus was literally pulling some switch and releasing the Spirit."

I'm not sure what exactly you're trying to say here in the context of our discussion. Are you saying that the Holy Spirit had come and was already guiding the disciples before Jesus went away?

I asked: *Do you believe you've been "baptized by the Holy Spirit" and that it is teaching you "all things"?*

David: "Do you believe I am one of the twelve disciples to whom that passage is addressed? Of course not."

No, I don't think you are one of the twelve disciples (however, if I believed in supernaturalism, I don't know how I could rule this out). Many Christians teach that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is available to believers today, and claim that they have experienced this. They also believe that they are actively being led and taught by the Holy Spirit in their lives. Do you not believe these things?

I asked: *Do you think it would be wrong for believers today to suppose the Holy Spirit is speaking through them?*

*If so, why?*

David: "The Holy Spirit 'illuminates' the Scriptured which He already 'inspired'. Yes, if they thought the Spirit was saying something new through them that would be wrong, since the very Bible they claim to believe claims authority over God's words to man. This doesn't mean the Spirit doesn't support and assist the believe who is trying to understand and apply the Bible (illumination)."

I'm not sure I follow. I recall numerous times when fellow believers at the church I attended claimed to be "moved" by the Holy Spirit (they tended to refer to it as "the Holy Ghost") to do things like donate to the church, help another congregant, lead a chorus, etc. Not sure if these are "new" or not. I guess one could argue either way.

I wrote: *The "common people" who listened to Jesus' teachings "heard him gladly" (Mark 12:37), which is not what one would expect if they were perplexed by teaching in unintelligible riddles.*

David: "So we're judging by the reaction of the masses? Do you really think 'heard him gladly' is equivalent to 'understood him fully'?"

I don't know. The text does not say explicitly. We have to infer from what is given. As I had stated, "heard him gladly" is not the reaction I would expect if they were confused or perplexed. Do you think they didn't understand Jesus and still "heard him gladly"?

I wrote: *The dependence which Objectivism has in mind in describing the primacy of consciousness as involving the notion or assumption that existence or some object "depends" on consciousness, is any kind of metaphysical dependence. See my The Primacy of Existence: A Validation; hopefully it will help clarify some things for you?*

David: "It clarifies what I already suspected and you had denied: the axiom defines God out of existence."

Hmmm... I'm not sure where the axiom says anything about "God." However, if it is true that theism assumes the primacy of consciousness, I would expect theism's defenders to suppose it defines their god out of existence. Would you disagree that the primacy of existence describes your experience of the world? Do the objects of your consciousness conform to your wishes, emotions, imaginations, fears, etc.? When you drive a car (I'm assuming you've driven before), would you say that your steering conforms to the road ahead of you, or that the road ahead of you conforms to your steering?

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 09, 2008 8:51 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "Thought you would be interested to see Steven Carr's brief interaction with Craig Blomberg and Darrel Bock (New Testament historians):

<http://blog.bible.org/primetimejesus/content/resurrection-probably-reported-same-year-it-happened>"

Thanks for the link. Not much of a discussion going on there. I found this statement interesting:

"By including reference to Jesus' crucifixion and *burial*, Paul makes it clear he is talking about *bodily* resurrection."

Really? It's not clear to me.

Blomberg's response to Steven Carr was also noteworthy:

"For further detail, see N. T. Wright's massive demonstration in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) that first-century Jews had no conception of resurrection except for physically embodied forms. Paul need not go into details because everyone would have understood what he was talking about."

The passage in question (I Cor. 15) was addressed to the Corinthian church. Were these Jews?

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 09, 2008 8:53 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

*I'm not sure what exactly you're trying to say here in the context of our discussion. Are you saying that the Holy Spirit had come and was already guiding the disciples before Jesus went away?*

Yes.

*No, I don't think you are one of the twelve disciples (however, if I believed in supernaturalism, I don't know how I could rule this out). Many Christians teach that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is available to believers today, and claim that they have experienced this. They also believe that they are actively being led and taught by the Holy Spirit in their lives. Do you not believe these things?*

That sounds like a pentecostal theology, but I'm not sure. I baptism of the Spirit that I believe in is simply regeneration - a new heart.

Ezekiel 36:26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

I don't believe the Holy Spirit teaches individuals new doctrine. The Bible itself claims to be the final authority and revelation, inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does help illuminate the Bible's teachings, which result in the believer changing their mind and eventually behavior to be in accordance with God's precepts (theologians call this sanctification, or being "set apart")

*I'm not sure I follow. I recall numerous times when fellow believers at the church I attended claimed to be "moved" by the Holy Spirit (they tended to refer to it as "the Holy Ghost") to do things like donate to the church, help another congregant, lead a chorus, etc. Not sure if these are "new" or not. I guess one could argue either way.*

As we were discussing before, people use religious language with the good intentions but not always accurate theology. I think the Holy Spirit can "tug on someone's heart" to do something, but usually only in hindsight have I ever suspected that some motivation I received was external. In my opinion, it is more likely that the Holy Spirit changes people to desire those things, and so even if the desire came penultimately from them, it originated from studying the Bible and being changed (sanctified). The essence of sanctification is new desires and a new mindset.

*I don't know. The text does not say explicitly. We have to infer from what is given. As I had stated, "heard him gladly" is not the reaction I would expect if they were confused or perplexed. Do you think they didn't understand Jesus and still "heard him gladly"?*

I really don't think we can infer one way or the other about how the masses interpreted his words. If Jesus' closest companions were confused (and what reason does Mark have for including this) then it doesn't really strike me as probable that the crowd has some deeper understanding.

I think they were intrigued by this strange, new, and popular teacher who challenged the Jewish super-religious authorities. How many people cheered on Obama and McCain this year but hadn't a clue as to the actual policy they were supporting?

*Hmmm... I'm not sure where the axiom says anything about "God." However, if it is true that theism assumes the primacy of consciousness, I would expect theism's defenders to suppose it defines their god out of existence. Would you disagree that the primacy of existence describes your experience of the world? Do the objects of your consciousness conform to your wishes, emotions, imaginations, fears, etc.? When you drive a car (I'm assuming you've driven before), would you say that your steering conforms to the road ahead of you, or that the road ahead of you conforms to your steering?*

I agree with the primacy of existence with respect to human consciousness; however, I see no reason to extend

the definition to some infinite consciousness. The road exists regardless of my conscious perception of it, and similarly for everything that exists. However, I must ask what kind of dependence must we establish before something truly "just exists" on its own? Science presumes that all things which began to exist at least have a necessary condition.

So let's just assume that quantum theory is correct, and the universe randomly popped out of a quantum sea of energy (the big bang). According to the physics, that would mean that before any **thing** existed, the laws of physics were already in place to allow for matter to begin to exist. So if you want to speak about dependence, a physicist might say that "existence" depends on those physical laws which preceded the big bang. But do physical laws "exist?" Most would say they do not (including you I presume). So now we have something prior to "existence" that indeed is the necessary, if not sufficient, condition for it. So there is still a problem with the primacy of existence unless it can be clarified more.

Speaking of clarity, I have yet to see any argument (from Thorn) as to why we should accept this definition of the primacy of existence. Why must we include **any** consciousness, both human and divine? Whatever divine consciousness entails, I'm pretty sure it is in no way comparable with a human. Simply formulating an axiom without explaining the terms is arbitrary.

Regarding the Blomberg link:

"By including reference to Jesus' crucifixion and burial, Paul makes it clear he is talking about bodily resurrection."

*Really? It's not clear to me.*

What's not clear about that? A clear understanding of first century Judaism might help. Besides that, I can also suggest the entire commentary that Dr. Blomberg authored on Corinthians.

"For further detail, see N. T. Wright's massive demonstration in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) that first-century Jews had no conception of resurrection except for physically embodied forms. Paul need not go into details because everyone would have understood what he was talking about."

*The passage in question (1 Cor. 15) was addressed to the Corinthian church. Were these Jews?*

Remember, Paul preached to the Jews first. Early Christians (especially prior to receiving these New Testament letters) were basically trained in Judaism and the Old Testament.

Early leaders in the Corinthian church would certainly have been Jewish, and also Paul stayed with Priscilla and Aquila when he first visited Corinth - both were Jewish and probably helped him setup the church there, in addition to traveling with him elsewhere.

[December 10, 2008 9:06 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

*I asked: I'm not sure what exactly you're trying to say here in the context of our discussion. Are you saying that the Holy Spirit had come and was already guiding the disciples before Jesus went away?*

David: "Yes."

So that part where the gospel of John has Jesus say, "if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you," what do you make of that?

*I asked: Many Christians teach that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is available to believers today, and claim that they have experienced this. They also believe that they are actively being led and taught by the Holy Spirit in their lives. Do you not believe these things?*

David: "That sounds like a pentecostal theology, but I'm not sure. I baptism of the Spirit that I believe in is simply regeneration - a new heart. Ezekiel 36:26 'Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh'."

So is that a yes? You do believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is available to believers today?



Would you say that believers who claim to be led and taught by the Holy Spirit in their lives are wrong?

David: "I don't believe the Holy Spirit teaches individuals new doctrine. The Bible itself claims to be the final authority and revelation, inspired by the Holy Spirit."

Does this mean that your god cannot (or will not) reveal any new knowledge or doctrine to man via the Holy Spirit?

David: "The Holy Spirit does help illuminate the Bible's teachings,"

How does this work? For instance, if you're reading a passage in the bible and you think it's being "illuminated" (whatever that means) to you, how would you know if it's not just your own insight, speculation, inference or some other self-generated cognition, or if it's the Holy Spirit doing this? Is there a certain feeling? A sensation? Is there a voice? Do you "just know"?

David: "I think the Holy Spirit can 'tug on someone's heart' to do something, but usually only in hindsight have I ever suspected that some motivation I received was external."

Could it be that there are believers who are more in-tune with the Holy Spirit's guidance in their lives than you are? Maybe you are trying too hard to rely on your own understanding ("pneumatology") while other believers are "letting go and letting God"?

I wrote: *I don't know. The text does not say explicitly. We have to infer from what is given. As I had stated, "heard him gladly" is not the reaction I would expect if they were confused or perplexed. Do you think they didn't understand Jesus and still "heard him gladly"?*

David: "I really don't think we can infer one way or the other about how the masses interpreted his words."

To say that they "heard him gladly" inclines the passage to the interpretation that they were satisfied in some way by what they heard from Jesus. Again, I wouldn't expect this kind of reaction from people who were perplexed or dumbfounded by what Jesus spoke. When the disciples are perplexed and dumbfounded, they aren't portrayed as being glad about it. So while the text is not explicit at this point, I do think what it does give us provides a basis for a reliable inference.

Mark 4:33-34 is also curious. Here Jesus is gathered with the disciples and an unspecified number of others (4:10 says "those around him with the twelve"), and teaches in parables: "With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything." Did these others understand Jesus? It says "they were able to hear it," and in many contexts this would mean they understood it. But Jesus finds that he needs to provide extra explanation of the parables to his disciples in private, for apparently they did not understand (otherwise why the additional explanation?). R?is?nen calls this "missionary preaching which must later be decoded for the chosen inner circle" (*The 'Messianic Secret' in Mark*, p. 106)

Meanwhile, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders understand Jesus' parable of the husbandmen perfectly well (Mark 12:1-12), and they understand Jesus when they accuse him of blasphemy, for to do this they had to understand that Jesus was essentially calling himself "God" in the flesh. So Mark portrays the inner circle as repeatedly failing to understand Jesus' teachings while outsiders often get it, completely opposite his announced policy in 4:11-12.

Of course, it is not difficult to understand why a preacher would be motivated to construe outsiders as blind. Wells notes:

**Missionary preachers - Christian and other - have repeatedly found it impossible to get their message across to the obdurate, that however good their sermon, few accept it. Such preachers can console themselves with the thought that God wishes it to be so, that he has determined in advance that an elect will be saved, and has made the rest unreceptive to the truth. (*The Jesus Legend*, p. 127)**

We find this tendency in Paul's teachings as well, when he explains why Jews predominantly reject Christianity (cf. Rom. 11:7), and claims that the Christian god "has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills." I remember a guy named Jim Jones (this was before your time, but I remember it quite vividly) who used the very same technique: when outsiders dismissed Jones' teaching as wrongheaded, Jones would make an



appeal to supernaturalism, claiming that dissenters were spiritually blinded from the “truths” which informed Jones’ teaching. In the end Jones and his 900 or so followers committed mass suicide in the jungle of Guyana.

David: “If Jesus’ closest companions were confused (and what reason does Mark have for including this) then it doesn’t really strike me as probable that the crowd has some deeper understanding.”

Jesus’ disciples were clearly confused, as the stories in Mark depict them. The crowd would not need to have “some deeper understanding,” as if they had gotten something that was truly recondite. They could have simply understood, on a practical level (one which eluded the disciples), and already been ahead of the disciples on that score.

David: “How many people cheered on Obama and McCain this year but hadn’t a clue as to the actual policy they were supporting?”

Indeed. People seem to think, especially in the case of Obama, that something “new” was being revealed. Similarly with people in Jesus’ day, according to the gospels. But what was so new about Jesus’ teachings?

Regarding the primacy of existence:

*I wrote: Hmm... I’m not sure where the axiom says anything about “God.” However, if it is true that theism assumes the primacy of consciousness, I would expect theism’s defenders to suppose it defines their god out of existence. Would you disagree that the primacy of existence describes your experience of the world? Do the objects of your consciousness conform to your wishes, emotions, imaginations, fears, etc.? When you drive a car (I’m assuming you’ve driven before), would you say that your steering conforms to the road ahead of you, or that the road ahead of you conforms to your steering?*

David: “I agree with the primacy of existence with respect to human consciousness;”

I wouldn’t say that the primacy of existence obtains only in the case of human consciousness. It does in the case of non-human animal consciousness as well. In fact, in every instance of consciousness we find in nature, the primacy of existence obtains. However, there’s nothing to stop someone from \*imagining\* that a consciousness outside of nature enjoys the opposite relationship.

David: “however, I see no reason to extend the definition to some infinite consciousness.”

What is an “infinite consciousness”? Where do you get such an idea? To what does it refer? Why would you suppose there is such a thing? How did you form your concept of consciousness, and from what inputs, such that it makes sense to describe something as an “infinite consciousness”? Is an “infinite consciousness” something that we can only imagine? Or is there some objective method by which we can apprehend it?

David: “The road exists regardless of my conscious perception of it, and similarly for everything that exists.”

Exactly. The road - including the fact that it exists and its particular nature as a road - does not depend on your consciousness. This is what we mean when we say it exists \*independent\* of your consciousness. It exists independent of mine as well. The road you’re familiar with still has its turns and grades even if I’ve never been on it, even if I do not even know it exists.

David: “However, I must ask what kind of dependence must we establish before something truly ‘just exists’ on it’s own?”

I don’t think existence depends in any way on something else. To say that it does seems nonsensical: either that thing on which existence is said to depend would itself have to exist (i.e., it just asserts more existence, which is said to depend on something else), or what it supposedly depends on does not exist (which is baffling if it is supposed to explain anything). How would either option solve anything? And what would necessitate either option? Why not just start with existence?

David: “Science presumes that all things which began to exist at least have a necessary condition.”

I don’t think existence “began to exist,” or that some “necessary condition” precedes (i.e., exists before) existence. It would make no sense to me to posit a “necessary condition” which exists but is before existence.

David: "So let's just assume that quantum theory is correct, and the universe randomly popped out of a quantum sea of energy (the big bang)."

Even if we assume this, we're still starting with existence - namely with something you called "a quantum sea of energy." That "quantum sea of energy" exists, right? Most big bang models that I have seen posit some pre-existing singularity as the initial state of what became the inflationary universe we have today. If the singularity existed before the big bang took, it existed, there was existence. It was what it was, independent of consciousness.

David: "According the physics, that would mean that before any thing existed, the laws of physics were already in place to allow for matter to begin to exist."

What are "the laws of physics"? Are they *truths*? If so, they would be conceptual - i.e., identifications (in the form of concepts) of specific relations which have been observed and integrated into general principles which can be applied in a variety of circumstances. So if a physicist argued this, he's getting the orientation of the subject-object relationship confused. Essentially, he'd be committing the fallacy of the stolen concept. Are the laws of physics forces? If so, do those forces exist? If so, that's existence, so we're right back to where we started from.

David: "So if you want to speak about dependence, a physicist might say that "existence" depends on those physical laws which preceded the big bang. But do physical laws 'exist'? Most would say they do not (including you I presume)."

It depends on what the term "physical laws" is supposed to denote. If they denote something that exists, then we're beginning with existence if we begin with physical laws. If they do not really exist, then this would amount to the view that existence depends on something that doesn't exist, i.e., on non-existence. But since we begin with existence, this is unnecessary. I see no reason why we should begin with non-existence. Indeed, it is because many thinkers want to begin, at least tacitly, with non-existence as their foundation, that they think they need an explanation for the fact that existence exists. This inevitably veers them into the primacy of consciousness: they want to point to a form of consciousness which willed everything else into existence. But why begin with non-existence though? I've not seen any good reason for this. The mind doesn't begin there. Why suppose reality does?

David: "So now we have something prior to 'existence' that indeed is the necessary, if not sufficient, condition for it."

And if it exists, well, it's just more existence. So we're on our way to an infinite regress at this point, unless of course you want to arbitrarily stop at some point. Then again, what was your starting point? Blank out.

David: "So there is still a problem with the primacy of existence unless it can be clarified more."

The primacy of existence has to do with the relationship between a consciousness and its objects. Did a consciousness create existence? I don't think so. Did consciousness create matter? I don't think so. It seems that you allow that the primacy of existence applies in the case of human consciousness, but you want to suspend it in the case of something you call a "divine consciousness." We can imagine such things, but the imaginary is not real, David.

David: "Speaking of clarity, I have yet to see any argument (from Thorn) as to why we should accept this definition of the primacy of existence."

You accepted it already when you acknowledged: "The road exists regardless of my conscious perception of it, and similarly for everything that exists." What's wrong now? Do you have an alternative definition for the primacy of existence that you would like to propose an argue for?

David: "Why must we include any consciousness, both human and divine?"

What "divine consciousness"? What is that? How can we reliably distinguish it from something that is only imaginary? You do realize that there is a fundamental difference between the real and the imaginary, right? Would you also agree that our epistemology (our method of acquiring and validating knowledge about reality) needs to conform to the orientation between us as subjects and the world of objects (i.e., with the primacy of existence)? I doubt you would say that something is true because you want it to be.

David: "Whatever divine consciousness entails, I'm pretty sure it is in no way comparable with a human."

Fine. Then what justifies calling it consciousness? What justifies the use of the same concept to denote it?

David: "Simply formulating an axiom without explaining the terms is arbitrary."

I know that Thorn has a page on important terms on the link I gave you, so I don't think he's formulating anything without explaining his terms. What exactly is unclear to you?

Regarding the Blomberg link:

Blomberg: "By including reference to Jesus' crucifixion and burial, Paul makes it clear he is talking about bodily resurrection."

I wrote: *Really? It's not clear to me.*

David: "What's not clear about that? A clear understanding of first century Judaism might help."

Here's what's not clear to me: when someone affirms that someone has been resurrected from the dead, that pointing to that person's burial upon death "makes it clear" that he means "bodily resurrection." Since these kinds of claims represent such a fundamental departure from reality as I know it, unless something is explicitly stated, there's nothing very clear about any of it.

David: "Besides that, I can also suggest the entire commentary that Dr. Blomberg authored on Corinthians."

I'm quite confident that Blomberg wants to believe that conversations took place in the early church which affirm what he himself believes. But that doesn't "make it clear" to others.

Blomberg: "For further detail, see N. T. Wright's massive demonstration in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) that first-century Jews had no conception of resurrection except for physically embodied forms. Paul need not go into details because everyone would have understood what he was talking about."

I asked: *The passage in question (1 Cor. 15) was addressed to the Corinthian church. Were these Jews?*

David: "Remember, Paul preached to the Jews first. Early Christians (especially prior to receiving these New Testament letters) were basically trained in Judaism and the Old Testament. Early leaders in the Corinthian church would certainly have been Jewish, and also Paul stayed with Priscilla and Aquila when he first visited Corinth - both were Jewish and probably helped him setup the church there, in addition to traveling with him elsewhere."

I'm sorry, I'll ask again: Was the congregation at the Corinthian church Jewish or Greek (originally pagan)?

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 10, 2008 10:31 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

*So that part where the gospel of John has Jesus say, "if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you," what do you make of that?*

Well, since you think John was written much later and embellished, let me ask you the same question. Why did John introduce something that, according to your interpretation, makes no sense? If indeed John intended what you assume he did, that the Holy Spirit had no role prior to Jesus' ascension (or Pentecost?), then why should John make such an obvious blunder?

As to my take on the verse, let's make sure we get the whole picture of what John says:

14:16 "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; "

14:26 ""But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

15:26 ""But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:"

16:7 ""Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."

So in summary, John claim that Jesus promised that the spirit would teach his disciples 'all thing', help them remember what he had said to them, and 'guide' them 'into all truth'. That seems dandy. No problems there.

But what of this "I will send him unto you" business? Let's finish off the pericope at 16.

"And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: " 9"Of sin, because they believe not on me; " 10"Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; " 11"Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. " 12"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. " 13"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. " 14"He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. " 15"All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you."

So **when he is come** what will he do in the context of chapter 16? John has the big picture in mind now. He is trying to stress that Jesus must ascend to heaven in order for the "plan" to work out. The next step in the plan is for the Holy Spirit to indwell and grow the church (i.e. Pentecost and the book of Acts.)

I really don't see any problem here.

*So is that a yes? You do believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is available to believers today?*

Given the proper definition (which I provided) I would agree. I wouldn't agree with any sort of flailing, fall in the floor spectacle.

*Would you say that believers who claim to be led and taught by the Holy Spirit in their lives are wrong?*

Yup.

*Does this mean that your god cannot (or will not) reveal any new knowledge or doctrine to man via the Holy Spirit?*

Will not.

*How does this work? For instance, if you're reading a passage in the bible and you think it's being "illuminated" (whatever that means) to you, how would you know if it's not just your own insight, speculation, inference or some other self-generated cognition, or if it's the Holy Spirit doing this? Is there a certain feeling? A sensation? Is there a voice? Do you "just know"?*

Good question, and I believe you have asked a similar one before so forgive me if I answer the same way. Detecting the Holy Spirit's interaction is sort of like the opposite of reasoned self-interest. For instance, I am selfish by nature. If I find myself reading a passage and being motivated to truly love my neighbor as myself, even when it doesn't benefit me, that is a good hint something is going on. I certainly don't want to do it, but yet the more I read the more I am prompted to love them even when they wrong me. The process of being transformed is really where it becomes more apparent to move believers I think. You can't tell in the moment but after time passes you look at your life and think, "how the heck did this happen?" Perhaps you would say self-generated cognition is the culprit. Again, I am speaking from experience here so there is really no sense arguing the point.

*Could it be that there are believers who are more in-tune with the Holy Spirit's guidance in their lives than you are? Maybe you are trying too hard to rely on your own understanding ("pneumatology") while other believers are "letting go and letting God"?*

If that is true then the Bible is false, which means this guiding being isn't the Holy Spirit but some other creature.

*To say that they "heard him gladly" inclines the passage to the interpretation that they were satisfied in some way by what they heard from Jesus. Again, I wouldn't expect this kind of reaction from people who were perplexed or dumbfounded by what Jesus spoke. When the disciples are perplexed and dumbfounded, they aren't portrayed as being glad about it. So while the text is not explicit at this point, I do think what it does give us provides a basis for a reliable inference.*

This is pure rhetoric. Obviously a large group of people would react to Jesus in a different way than his close buddies. They know He has a reputation as a miracle worker and revolutionary, why not receive Him gladly? Who cares if He makes sense, the guy supposedly healed someone's blindness. Regardless, you certainly haven't demonstrated any "basis for a reliable inference" besides your own arbitrary exegesis of what "heard him gladly" implies. If you think that is a good exegetical move, then by all means don't let me stop you. You have your mind made up already, so I see no point in wasting effort.

*Of course, it is not difficult to understand why a preacher would be motivated to construe outsiders as blind. Wells notes:*

This seems to contradict you last point, which was that Mark portrays the outsiders as the ones who got the message. Which is it? What Wells says or what Wrede says? First you said "they were able to hear it" means the outsiders understood it, then you quote Wells who disagrees. Besides demonstrating two opposing sources, what was that accomplishing?

*Jesus' disciples were clearly confused, as the stories in Mark depict them. The crowd would not need to have "some deeper understanding," as if they had gotten something that was truly recondite. They could have simply understood, on a practical level (one which eluded the disciples), and already been ahead of the disciples on that score.*

Right, the crowd **could** also have been on LSD. Any reason why we should accept this particular scenario as more probable than the contract, i.e. that the audience probably had more understanding than Jesus' inner circle? Seems like a tough case to make, lets see it! :-)

*What is an "infinite consciousness"? Where do you get such an idea? To what does it refer? Why would you suppose there is such a thing? How did you form your concept of consciousness, and from what inputs, such that it makes sense to describe something as an "infinite consciousness"? Is an "infinite consciousness" something that we can only imagine? Or is there some objective method by which we can apprehend it?*

These are all good questions, but ones that you should answer since it is your system's axiom which denies it.

Are you also whittling down existence to that which can be perceived with the senses?

*I don't think existence "began to exist," or that some "necessary condition" precedes (i.e., exists before) existence. It would make no sense to me to posit a "necessary condition" which exists but is before existence.*

Guess quantum physics is incompatible with Objectivism.

*Even if we assume this, we're still starting with existence - namely with something you called "a quantum sea of energy." That "quantum sea of energy" exists, right? Most big bang models that I have seen posit some pre-existing singularity as the initial state of what became the inflationary universe we have today. If the singularity existed before the big bang took, it existed, there was existence. It was what it was, independent of consciousness.*

The quantum sea is actually a loose term that is describing the laws of nature. But you don't ascribe any ontological status to laws, so in your book it DOESN'T exist.

At any rate, I don't want to go off on a tangent with virtual particles and such. So you think the singularity "always existed?" You realize that implies an actual infinite, which is arguably not possible?

*What are "the laws of physics"? Are they truths? If so, they would be conceptual - i.e., identifications (in the*

*form of concepts) of specific relations which have been observed and integrated into general principles which can be applied in a variety of circumstances. So if a physicist argued this, he's getting the orientation of the subject-object relationship confused. Essentially, he'd be committing the fallacy of the stolen concept. Are the laws of physics forces? If so, do those forces exist? If so, that's existence, so we're right back to where we started from.*

Well according to what you said the laws of physics are a description of the way things work. But according to quantum physics, the first thing to "begin to exist" had no sufficient condition, but only a necessary condition of some physical laws. That's right, they somehow think physical laws prece the physical objects they describe!

I'm with you here, it doesn't make sense to me unless you believe "laws" exist. It just goes to show how silly it gets when you try to explain the origin of something from nothing. You seem to hold the position that the singularity always existed, correct?

*It depends on what the term "physical laws" is supposed to denote. If they denote something that exists, then we're beginning with existence if we begin with physical laws. If they do not really exist, then this would amount to the view that existence depends on something that doesn't exist, i.e., on non-existence. But since we begin with existence, this is unnecessary.*

Well how do we know (via Objectivism) if physical laws exist?

I would like to see you explain to a physicist that the laws of physics are unnecessary. ;) Jokes aside, is "since we begin with existence" really much of an argument? What if someone said, "since we begin with non-existence." What then?

*I see no reason why we should begin with non-existence. Indeed, it is because many thinkers want to begin, at least tacitly, with non-existence as their foundation, that they think they need an explanation for the fact that existence exists. This inevitably veers them into the primacy of consciousness: they want to point to a form of consciousness which willed everything else into existence. But why begin with non-existence though? I've not seen any good reason for this. The mind doesn't begin there. Why suppose reality does?*

Just because you "see no reason why we should begin with non-existence" does that constitute a reason for beginning with existence? That is argumentum ad ignorantium. Also, starting with non-existence is necessary if you find an actual infinite to be an impossible state of affairs.

*And if it exists, well, it's just more existence. So we're on our way to an infinite regress at this point, unless of course you want to arbitrarily stop at some point. Then again, what was your starting point? Blank out.*

I find it amusing that Objectivists use their own language much like religious people.

*The primacy of existence has to do with the relationship between a consciousness and its objects. Did a consciousness create existence? I don't think so. Did consciousness create matter? I don't think so. It seems that you allow that the primacy of existence applies in the case of human consciousness, but you want to suspend it in the case of something you call a "divine consciousness." We can imagine such things, but the imaginary is not real, David.*

You can assert things or say "I don't think so", but that doesn't compel me Dawson.

*You accepted it already when you acknowledged: "The road exists regardless of my conscious perception of it, and similarly for everything that exists." What's wrong now? Do you have an alternative definition for the primacy of existence that you would like to propose an argue for?*

Yup, just subtract the part that includes God. How did he reach the conclusion that all consciousness works this way with respect to reality? Hopefully not through his perception, because that presumes his perception is adequate to reveal the relationship (or lack of) between the two. That is quite an assumption on the reliability of sense perception.

David: "Why must we include any consciousness, both human and divine?"

*What "divine consciousness"? What is that? How can we reliably distinguish it from something that is only imaginary? You do realize that there is a fundamental difference between the real and the imaginary, right?*

*Would you also agree that our epistemology (our method of acquiring and validating knowledge about reality) needs to conform to the orientation between us as subjects and the world of objects (i.e., with the primacy of existence)? I doubt you would say that something is true because you want it to be.*

Right, but I wouldn't say something is false simply because I haven't sucked it through my senses. Logical positivism died out long ago.

*Fine. Then what justifies calling it consciousness? What justifies the use of the same concept to denote it?*

Maybe nothing, in which case the axiom has no bearing on the theistic God, and thus your claim that His existence is metaphysically impossible seems to have no support. The only "argument" I've heard so far is He can't exist because the primacy of existence says He can't.

*I'm sorry, I'll ask again: Was the congregation at the Corinthian church Jewish or Greek (originally pagan)?*

I'm pretty sure you know the answer is BOTH. As I've already pointed out, new converts were schooled in the ways of Jewish thought, and the leadership in the church was Jewish.

[December 11, 2008 1:12 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I asked: *So that part where the gospel of John has Jesus say, "if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you," what do you make of that?*

David: "Well, since you think John was written much later and embellished, let me ask you the same question. Why did John introduce something that, according to your interpretation, makes no sense? If indeed John intended what you assume he did, that the Holy Spirit had no role prior to Jesus' ascension (or Pentecost?), then why should John make such an obvious blunder?"

As I pointed out earlier, Matthew's and Luke's revisions of Mark's gospel demonstrate that the early Christians considered the story open to variation. So even if author of the gospel of John was directly aware of Mark's gospel, he probably wouldn't have considered this a "blunder," but an improvement. But on the assumption that the gospels are supposed to present a wholly unified and harmonious view, yes, "blunder" seems the appropriate word.

David: "So when he is come what will he do in the context of chapter 16? John has the big picture in mind now. He is trying to stress that Jesus must ascend to heaven in order for the "plan" to work out. The next step in the plan is for the Holy Spirit to indwell and grow the church (i.e. Pentecost and the book of Acts.) I really don't see any problem here."

So John indicates that the Holy Spirit will not come until Jesus has ascended (after his death, crucifixion and resurrection), but you still think the Holy Spirit came before this. Okay.

I asked: *So is that a yes? You do believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is available to believers today?*

David: "Given the proper definition (which I provided) I would agree. I wouldn't agree with any sort of flailing, fall in the floor spectacle."

So different Christians think that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is manifested in different ways. That's interesting.

I asked: *Would you say that believers who claim to be led and taught by the Holy Spirit in their lives are wrong?*

David: "Yup."

And of course, they would say you're wrong for calling them wrong, wouldn't they? Who is being led by the Holy Spirit in the case of such contentions within the fold?

I asked: *Does this mean that your god cannot (or will not) reveal any new knowledge or doctrine to man via the Holy Spirit?*



David: "Will not."

I see. So it's deliberately withholding knowledge from us. What a kind and loving father.

David: "If I find myself reading a passage and being motivated to truly love my neighbor as myself, even when it doesn't benefit me, that is a good hint something is going on."

So it's a feeling? How long does it last?

David: "I certainly don't want to do it,"

Earlier you had indicated that you think the Holy Spirit changes people's desires. Does it change other people's desires, but not yours?

David: "but yet the more I read the more I am prompted to love them even when they wrong me."

Do your neighbors wrong you frequently? What do they do?

David: "The process of being transformed is really where it becomes more apparent to move believers I think."

Yes, that's what other believers have told me. They claim to be "moved" by the Holy Spirit. But above you seem to be saying that believers who claim to be led and taught by the Holy Spirit in their lives are wrong.

David: "You can't tell in the moment but after time passes you look at your life and think, 'how the heck did this happen'?"

And as a believer, your natural inclination is to answer such questions by pointing to a supernatural force, right?

David: "Perhaps you would say self-generated cognition is the culprit."

I'm just wondering how one can distinguish the two, especially if he's anxious to believe that he's among the chosen and wants to view his life as one being favored by his god.

David: "Again, I am speaking from experience here so there is really no sense arguing the point."

Your comments were very helpful, David. I do appreciate it.

I asked: *Could it be that there are believers who are more in-tune with the Holy Spirit's guidance in their lives than you are? Maybe you are trying too hard to rely on your own understanding ("pneumatology") while other believers are "letting go and letting God"?*

David: "If that is true then the Bible is false, which means this guiding being isn't the Holy Spirit but some other creature."

I'm not sure why you would say this in response to my question. Apparently you don't think other believers could be more in-tune with the Holy Spirit's guidance in their lives than you are? I'm not sure why it's either-or here: either they aren't in-tune with the Holy Spirit's guidance more than you are, or if they are (or claim to be), then the bible is false. Is that what you meant to indicate?

I wrote: *To say that they "heard him gladly" inclines the passage to the interpretation that they were satisfied in some way by what they heard from Jesus. Again, I wouldn't expect this kind of reaction from people who were perplexed or dumbfounded by what Jesus spoke. When the disciples are perplexed and dumbfounded, they aren't portrayed as being glad about it. So while the text is not explicit at this point, I do think what it does give us provides a basis for a reliable inference.*

David: "This is pure rhetoric."

Really? In which sense of "rhetoric"? Here are some definitions from the dictionary:

1. (in writing or speech) the undue use of exaggeration or display; bombast.

2. the art or science of all specialized literary uses of language in prose or verse, including the figures of speech.
3. the study of the effective use of language.
4. the ability to use language effectively.
5. the art of prose in general as opposed to verse.
6. the art of making persuasive speeches; oratory.

Maybe you have another in mind?

David: "Obviously a large group of people would react to Jesus in a different way than his close buddies."

Why? Would the crowd be glad with Jesus' words, and his close buddies unhappy with them?

David: "They know He has a reputation as a miracle worker and revolutionary, why not receive Him gladly?"

That's true - this was a time when miracle-workers were a-plenty. They were counterparts to today's stand-up comedians in a way, providing entertainment, often for free.

David: "Who cares if He makes sense, the guy supposedly healed someone's blindness."

But Jesus did his best to keep his healings a secret, telling people not to tell anyone.

David: "Regardless, you certainly haven't demonstrated any 'basis for a reliable inference' besides your own arbitrary exegesis of what 'heard him gladly' implies."

How is it arbitrary?

David: "If you think that is a good exegetical move, then by all means don't let me stop you. You have your mind made up already, so I see no point in wasting effort."

Well, you needn't get upset over it, David. I'm just trying to have a discussion with you. Where's your neighborly love?

I wrote: *Of course, it is not difficult to understand why a preacher would be motivated to construe outsiders as blind. Wells notes:*

David: "This seems to contradict you last point, which was that Mark portrays the outsiders as the ones who got the message. Which is it? What Wells says or what Wrede says? First you said "they were able to hear it" means the outsiders understood it, then you quote Wells who disagrees. Besides demonstrating two opposing sources, what was that accomplishing?"

You're confusing yourself here, David. Wells is not disagreeing that Mark portrays outsiders as understanding Jesus. At various points they do, in spite of Jesus' expressed intention to keep them blinded or hardened (an intention which itself seems pretty hard-hearted). Wells is pointing out how preachers tend to explain outsiders' non-acceptance of the message preached. Outsiders can and often do understand what they are being told to believe, but when they fail to be persuaded the preacher has a canned, self-serving explanation for this ready to deploy.

I wrote: *Jesus' disciples were clearly confused, as the stories in Mark depict them. The crowd would not need to have "some deeper understanding," as if they had gotten something that was truly recondite. They could have simply understood, on a practical level (one which eluded the disciples), and already been ahead of the disciples on that score.*

David: "Right, the crowd could also have been on LSD."

I'm sure glad you're above rhetoric, David.

David: "Any reason why we should accept this particular scenario as more probable than the contract, i.e. that the audience probably had more understanding than Jesus' inner circle? Seems like a tough case to make, let's see it! :-)"

I'm supposing that any case I present will be dismissed as "pure rhetoric." So why should I bother?

I asked: *What is an “infinite consciousness”? Where do you get such an idea? To what does it refer? Why would you suppose there is such a thing? How did you form your concept of consciousness, and from what inputs, such that it makes sense to describe something as an “infinite consciousness”? Is an “infinite consciousness” something that we can only imagine? Or is there some objective method by which we can apprehend it?*

David: “These are all good questions, but ones that you should answer since it is your system's axiom which denies it.”

My system does not assert something called an “infinite consciousness.” So why should I have to explain what it is? You’re the one who’s apparently endorsing such a notion. So why not explain it?

David: “Are you also whittling down existence to that which can be perceived with the senses?”

No. There are things which we will never perceive and yet still exist. Our ability to perceive something is not a precondition of something’s existence. But since our awareness of reality begins with perception, our epistemology needs to take this into account. It also needs to take into account the fact that objects hold metaphysical primacy over our cognition. We also need to keep in mind that there is a fundamental distinction between what is real and what we merely imagine. Do you have any objections to any of these policies?

I wrote: *I don’t think existence “began to exist,” or that some “necessary condition” precedes (i.e., exists before) existence. It would make no sense to me to posit a “necessary condition” which exists but is before existence.*

David: “Guess quantum physics is incompatible with Objectivism.”

Does quantum physics say that existence began to exist? There are different schools of physics, you know. A quote might be helpful. For an Objectivist view of physics, you might want to check into the work of Dr. David Harriman, a physicist who is also an Objectivist. He has an interesting piece called “Physicists Lost in Space.” He makes some really interesting points and is rather entertaining as well.

I wrote: *Even if we assume this, we’re still starting with existence - namely with something you called “a quantum sea of energy.” That “quantum sea of energy” exists, right? Most big bang models that I have seen posit some pre-existing singularity as the initial state of what became the inflationary universe we have today. If the singularity existed before the big bang took, it existed, there was existence. It was what it was, independent of consciousness.*

David: “The quantum sea is actually a loose term that is describing the laws of nature. But you don't ascribe any ontological status to laws, so in your book it DOESN'T exist.”

Well, it depends what the term “laws of nature” is supposed to denote. If it denotes a physical force or set of physical forces which exist, and they in fact exist, then in my book they exist. That’s existence. Existence exists. So we need to be clear about what we’re talking about. That’s all I’m saying. Do you object to this?

David: “At any rate, I don't want to go off on a tangent with virtual particles and such. So you think the singularity ‘always existed’? You realize that implies an actual infinite, which is arguably not possible?”

Again, there are numerous different theories about singularities. My point is that if the big bang began with something existing as a singularity, we’re still beginning with existence. I think this was clear. I’m not affirming any actual infinities. Besides, I’m not an advocate of the big bang theory to begin with.

I wrote: *What are “the laws of physics”? Are they truths? If so, they would be conceptual - i.e., identifications (in the form of concepts) of specific relations which have been observed and integrated into general principles which can be applied in a variety of circumstances. So if a physicist argued this, he’s getting the orientation of the subject-object relationship confused. Essentially, he’d be committing the fallacy of the stolen concept. Are the laws of physics forces? If so, do those forces exist? If so, that’s existence, so we’re right back to where we started from.*

David: “Well according to what you said the laws of physics are a description of the way things work.”

If they are a description, this is epistemological, and is comprised of concepts. I don’t think physicists are saying

that the universe or reality began with a “description.” So physicists probably have something else in mind. That’s why it’s important to ask what it is they do have in mind.

David: “But according to quantum physics, the first thing to ‘begin to exist’ had no sufficient condition, but only a necessary condition of some physical laws. That’s right, they somehow think physical laws prece the physical objects they describe!”

Yes, there’s a lot of bad philosophy in the science of physics, no doubt. I’m quite thankful to Dr. Harriman for his work in this area.

David: “I’m with you here, it doesn’t make sense to me unless you believe ‘laws’ exist.”

Whether or not it makes sense depends crucially on what “laws” is supposed to denote. Is it supposed to denote something that exists (if so, we’re beginning with existence at that point); or does it denote a description, a set of principles, some cognitive artifice? If so, at this point they’ve committed the fallacy of the stolen concept. I see no legitimate reason why such a move would be necessary.

David: “It just goes to show how silly it gets when you try to explain the origin of something from nothing.”

Indeed. As I asked before: Why not begin with existence? Is there an alternative here?

David: “You seem to hold the position that the singularity always existed, correct?”

It’s not my position per se. It’s what I gather from sources I’ve consulted on the subject (e.g., Alan Guth et al.). The view as I understand it is that before the big bang everything which currently occupies the inflationary universe existed as a “singularity” (whatever that is construed to be). If the singularity existed, well, that’s existence, is it not? I’ve never really understood the big bang to be saying that the universe popped into existence from nothing, though I realize a lot of popular renditions of the theory seem to have this in mind.

*I wrote: It depends on what the term “physical laws” is supposed to denote. If they denote something that exists, then we’re beginning with existence if we begin with physical laws. If they do not really exist, then this would amount to the view that existence depends on something that doesn’t exist, i.e., on non-existence. But since we begin with existence, this is unnecessary.*

David: “Well how do we know (via Objectivism) if physical laws exist?”

As with anything: by means of reason.

David: “I would like to see you explain to a physicist that the laws of physics are unnecessary. ;) Jokes aside, is ‘since we begin with existence’ really much of an argument? What if someone said, ‘since we begin with non-existence’. What then?”

That would be his problem, not mine.

*I wrote: I see no reason why we should begin with non-existence. Indeed, it is because many thinkers want to begin, at least tacitly, with non-existence as their foundation, that they think they need an explanation for the fact that existence exists. This inevitably veers them into the primacy of consciousness: they want to point to a form of consciousness which willed everything else into existence. But why begin with non-existence though? I’ve not seen any good reason for this. The mind doesn’t begin there. Why suppose reality does?*

David: “Just because you ‘see no reason why we should begin with non-existence’ does that constitute a reason for beginning with existence?”

We already have a reason to begin with existence: the fact that existence exists. The fact that I see no reason why we should begin with non-existence is not offered as an argument for beginning with existence. It’s simply an attendant observation.

David: “That is argumentum ad ignorantium.”

If that was my only reason for beginning with existence, you may be able to argue this. But you should be all the wiser now.

David: "Also, starting with non-existence is necessary if you find an actual infinite to be an impossible state of affairs."

To what does "non-existence" refer, David?

I wrote: *And if it exists, well, it's just more existence. So we're on our way to an infinite regress at this point, unless of course you want to arbitrarily stop at some point. Then again, what was your starting point? Blank out.*

David: "I find it amusing that Objectivists use their own language much like religious people."

Is this a dig at Objectivism, or at religious people?

I wrote: *The primacy of existence has to do with the relationship between a consciousness and its objects. Did a consciousness create existence? I don't think so. Did consciousness create matter? I don't think so. It seems that you allow that the primacy of existence applies in the case of human consciousness, but you want to suspend it in the case of something you call a "divine consciousness." We can imagine such things, but the imaginary is not real, David.*

David: "You can assert things or say 'I don't think so', but that doesn't compel me Dawson."

Well, fiddlesticks! My reasoning fails to compel someone who wants to believe in invisible magic beings! Darn it!

I wrote: *You accepted it already when you acknowledged: "The road exists regardless of my conscious perception of it, and similarly for everything that exists." What's wrong now? Do you have an alternative definition for the primacy of existence that you would like to propose an argue for?*

David: "Yup, just subtract the part that includes God."

No, not "subtract." That implies it was there all along, which is deliberately spurious. We simply have no need to factor into our view arbitrary notions, whether it be the Christian god, the Muslim's Allah, the Hindu's Brahman, the Lahu's Geusha, etc. You're taking this so personally.

David: "How did he reach the conclusion that all consciousness works this way with respect to reality?"

Well, first of all, by forming the concept 'consciousness' objectively - that is, on the basis of input from reality (as opposed to input from imagination). Also, various tests can be conducted to demonstrate the truth of the primacy of existence. I pointed you to a link earlier which gave some simple tests which you can conduct yourself. With an intact concept of consciousness, we need to ask: what allows for the diametric opposite orientation between subject and object in the proposed idea (e.g., "God" or "Blarko" or "Guesha")? If there is no legitimate evidence to the contrary, and all proposed evidence in view of such a thing turns out to be accessible only by the imagination, then the verdict that such a notion is arbitrary and useless is sealed. I know that theists won't like this, but that's my view.

David: "Why must we include any consciousness, both human and divine?"

I wrote: *What "divine consciousness"? What is that? How can we reliably distinguish it from something that is only imaginary? You do realize that there is a fundamental difference between the real and the imaginary, right? Would you also agree that our epistemology (our method of acquiring and validating knowledge about reality) needs to conform to the orientation between us as subjects and the world of objects (i.e., with the primacy of existence)? I doubt you would say that something is true because you want it to be.*

David: "Right, but I wouldn't say something is false simply because I haven't sucked it through my senses. Logical positivism died out long ago."

Meanwhile, my questions go unanswered. I'm disappointed, David.

David: "Whatever divine consciousness entails, I'm pretty sure it is in no way comparable with a human."

I wrote: *Fine. Then what justifies calling it consciousness? What justifies the use of the same concept to denote it?*

David: "Maybe nothing, in which case the axiom has no bearing on the theistic God, and thus your claim that His existence is metaphysically impossible seems to have no support. The only 'argument' I've heard so far is He can't exist because the primacy of existence says He can't."

Well, if your god is not conscious, then there's no need for an argument. Your god is as non-conscious as a rock.

I asked: *I'm sorry, I'll ask again: Was the congregation at the Corinthian church Jewish or Greek (originally pagan)?*

David: "I'm pretty sure you know the answer is BOTH. As I've already pointed out, new converts were schooled in the ways of Jewish thought, and the leadership in the church was Jewish."

Yes, new converts just happened to be schooled in what you believe today. Okay. Got it.

If you're getting frustrated, maybe you could call on the Holy Spirit to intervene? Sort of a *dues ex machina* to come down and force me into submission.

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 11, 2008 9:43 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

*So John indicates that the Holy Spirit will not come until Jesus has ascended (after his death, crucifixion and resurrection), but you still think the Holy Spirit came before this. Okay.*

You realize John himself mentions the Holy Spirit's activity prior to this statement right?

John 1:32 : "And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him."

Thus if "will not come" means what you assume it does, then John is incoherent. It is an oversimplification to conclude that "to come" insinuates absolute presence or absence. As I've already shown, the larger context of chapter 16 gives this statement meaning. If you're still stuck at "but to come means he wasn't there before" then again, consider that John tells us later:

John 20:21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."  
22And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

This is basically how I see our discussion (I like narratives):

David: until my father dies, I will not receive his inheritance

Dawson: oh ok, so you're saying your father never gave you anything before he died?

David: no I'm saying that when he dies I will receive something symbolic and unique that will signify taking over his estate

Dawson: oh ok, so you're saying your father never gave you anything before he died?

*So different Christians think that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is manifested in different ways. That's interesting.*

*And also, And of course, they would say you're wrong for calling them wrong, wouldn't they? Who is being led by the Holy Spirit in the case of such contentions within the fold?*

Christians must solve their disputes by exegeting the Bible. Pentecostal theology is centered around a particular exegesis of 1 Corinthians.

*So it's a feeling? How long does it last?*

A change of character is not a feeling, and I have yet to see it cease.

*Earlier you had indicated that you think the Holy Spirit changes people's desires. Does it change other people's desires, but not yours?*

You are referring specifically to the desire to change. I was specifically referring to the desire to love my neighbor in my example. In general, even the desire to change can change (Christians call this "softening the heart")

*Do your neighbors wrong you frequently? What do they do?*

They can be selfish and inconsiderate, or perhaps they try to take advantage of me. There are all sorts of things people do to wrong one another.

*Yes, that's what other believers have told me. They claim to be "moved" by the Holy Spirit. But above you seem to be saying that believers who claim to be led and taught by the Holy Spirit in their lives are wrong.*

Let me just make a general observation here. You seem to always want to force simplistic definitions or understandings onto things so you can easily dismiss them as contradiction or incoherent. I think it's what you're doing with John 16, and I also think you're doing it here. Just thought I'd let you know that's what it appears like to me. It is almost as if your mind searches for the easiest possible way to defeat something, and you go with it. It is really interesting, but sometimes results in a complete misunderstanding or misrepresentation of what another person is saying.

*I'm just wondering how one can distinguish the two, especially if he's anxious to believe that he's among the chosen and wants to view his life as one being favored by his god.*

If you're referring to me in particular I would disagree with your assessment of my thinking. But then again, if atheism is true why should we even care to distinguish? What difference does it make if my perceptions are not properly reflective of reality? This is an honest question. Why should I care about truth in an atheist world?

*I'm not sure why you would say this in response to my question. Apparently you don't think other believers could be more in-tune with the Holy Spirit's guidance in their lives than you are? I'm not sure why it's either-or here: either they aren't in-tune with the Holy Spirit's guidance more than you are, or if they are (or claim to be), then the bible is false. Is that what you meant to indicate?*

I'm saying that if the Holy Spirit is acting in contradiction to what the Bible teaches about Him, then that means we aren't talking about the Holy Spirit as described in the Bible.

Dawson: "were satisfied in some way by what they heard from Jesus. Again, I wouldn't expect this kind of reaction from people who were perplexed or dumbfounded by what Jesus spoke. When the disciples are perplexed and dumbfounded, they aren't portrayed as being glad about it. So while the text is not explicit at this point, I do think what it does give us provides a basis for a reliable inference. "

*Maybe you have another in mind?*

The meaning I had in mind is when you try to use language to persuade instead of argument. For instance, in your previous comment you used the following rhetorical devices:

1. "To say...inclines the passage to the interpretation" - this is merely a rewording of the base assertion you are trying to defend, namely that "heard him gladly" implies some understanding which the disciples lacked. They could have been satisfied in any number of ways, so it is also vague with respect to what you are trying to establish.
2. "I wouldn't expect this kind of reaction" - how is this relevant to whether or not it is true?
3. "I do think what it does give us provides a basis for reliable inference" - again in the study of ancient texts and exegesis, how exactly do you define "reliable inference." Do you think that because the text suggests it, or because it supports your theory?

*Why? Would the crowd be glad with Jesus' words, and his close buddies unhappy with them?*

Because his buddies were actually trying to figure out what the heck he was talking about. They did sort of leave their jobs for him.



*That's true - this was a time when miracle-workers were a-plenty. They were counterparts to today's stand-up comedians in a way, providing entertainment, often for free.*

And I think this works against your position, because if that is true then we have less reason to expect the crowd to "hear him gladly" in a way that implies understanding as opposed to entertainment or mere herd-like behavior.

David: "Regardless, you certainly haven't demonstrated any 'basis for a reliable inference' besides your own arbitrary exegesis of what 'heard him gladly' implies."

*How is it arbitrary?*

Well aside from your usual use of "not what one would expect" what else has supported your argument? Let me review your statements:

"The "common people" who listened to Jesus' teachings "heard him gladly" (Mark 12:37), which is not what one would expect if they were perplexed by teaching in unintelligible riddles."

"As I had stated, "heard him gladly" is not the reaction I would expect if they were confused or perplexed"

"Again, I wouldn't expect this kind of reaction from people who were perplexed or dumbfounded by what Jesus spoke."

Hmm, three times you told me you wouldn't expect this reaction. It is arbitrary because you are making a move from "gladly hear" to "understand," but with no other reason than your expectations? I have shown on several grounds that this is a bad move. I'm sure you'll respond by saying "where have you shown this?"

David: "If you think that is a good exegetical move, then by all means don't let me stop you. You have your mind made up already, so I see no point in wasting effort."

*Well, you needn't get upset over it, David. I'm just trying to have a discussion with you. Where's your neighborly love?*

I'm not upset at all, but I recognize when you're trying to discuss and when you're trying to quarrel.

*You're confusing yourself here, David. Wells is not disagreeing that Mark portrays outsiders as understanding Jesus. At various points they do, in spite of Jesus' expressed intention to keep them blinded or hardened (an intention which itself seems pretty hard-hearted). Wells is pointing out how preachers tend to explain outsiders' non-acceptance of the message preached. Outsiders can and often do understand what they are being told to believe, but when they fail to be persuaded the preacher has a canned, self-serving explanation for this ready to deploy.*

I am not sure how that Wells quote has any bearing on our discussion? You had just said, "So Mark portrays the inner circle as repeatedly failing to understand Jesus' teachings while outsiders often get it, completely opposite his announced policy in 4:11-12." Then you said, "Of course, it is not difficult to understand why a preacher would be motivated to construe outsiders as blind."

You gave an example about outsiders and preachers as well, but how does this relate to our discussion of John 16 and your previous statement about Mark 4?

*I'm sure glad you're above rhetoric, David.*

My point is that you were talking about what "could" happen and that isn't much of an argument. We could speculate all day about what could have happened.

*I'm supposing that any case I present will be dismissed as "pure rhetoric." So why should I bother?*

If you feel you have made a substantive argument in some place which I have deemed rhetorical, we can certainly revisit it. I don't just toss that around unless I truly mean it. That would be using rhetoric as rhetoric! ? And please don't hesitate to make your case. I promise not to call it rhetoric unless I point out exactly what I mean.

*What is an "infinite consciousness"? Where do you get such an idea? To what does it refer? Why would you*

*suppose there is such a thing? How did you form your concept of consciousness, and from what inputs, such that it makes sense to describe something as an “infinite consciousness”? Is an “infinite consciousness” something that we can only imagine? Or is there some objective method by which we can apprehend it?*

- a) the theistic God
- b) His revelation of Himself in the Bible
- c) the theistic God
- d) consciousness is the ability to perceive the subject-object relationship.
- e) rationality
- f) no
- g) As with anything, by reason.

*My system does not assert something called an “infinite consciousness.” So why should I have to explain what it is? You’re the one who’s apparently endorsing such a notion. So why not explain it?*

The axiom states that existence is independent of human and divine consciousness. Is it not the onus of the one who holds a position to explain exactly what the terms mean? Your position makes the assertion, therefore your position should define the term.

*Do you have any objections to any of these policies?*

Not as you’ve stated them here.

*Does quantum physics say that existence began to exist?*

Yes. Just as a virtual particle begins to exist without any sufficient causal precondition, the singularity that caused the big bang popped out of nowhere.

*Well, it depends what the term “laws of nature” is supposed to denote. If it denotes a physical force or set of physical forces which exist, and they in fact exist, then in my book they exist. That’s existence. Existence exists. So we need to be clear about what we’re talking about. That’s all I’m saying. Do you object to this?*

Well this is about Objectivism’s position in relation to cosmology so my objections are irrelevant. On the model I referred to, the laws of physics are the necessary condition that precedes the singularity popping into existence. Thus we have laws before we have matter. But do the laws exist? If they do, then we have an invariant abstract universal entity. I don’t think atheists are going to allow that (it sounds too much like God). At any rate, it sounds like you believe the existence always existed...stuck with an actual infinite.

*Again, there are numerous different theories about singularities. My point is that if the big bang began with something existing as a singularity, we’re still beginning with existence. I think this was clear. I’m not affirming any actual infinities. Besides, I’m not an advocate of the big bang theory to begin with.*

I see, so do you hold to the steady-state model?

*It’s not my position per se. It’s what I gather from sources I’ve consulted on the subject (e.g., Alan Guth et al.). The view as I understand it is that before the big bang everything which currently occupies the inflationary universe existed as a “singularity” (whatever that is construed to be). If the singularity existed, well, that’s existence, is it not? I’ve never really understood the big bang to be saying that the universe popped into existence from nothing, though I realize a lot of popular renditions of the theory seem to have this in mind.*

I’m sorry, I’ll ask again: Do you hold the position that the singularity always existed?

*To what does “non-existence” refer, David?*

Nothing.

*No, not “subtract.” That implies it was there all along, which is deliberately spurious. We simply have no need to factor into our view arbitrary notions, whether it be the Christian god, the Muslim’s Allah, the Hindu’s Brahman, the Lahu’s Geusha, etc. You’re taking this so personally.*

I’m taking this personally, how so?

David: "Whatever divine consciousness entails, I'm pretty sure it is in no way comparable with a human."

I wrote: Fine. Then what justifies calling it consciousness? What justifies the use of the same concept to denote it?

David: "Maybe nothing, in which case the axiom has no bearing on the theistic God, and thus your claim that His existence is metaphysically impossible seems to have no support. The only 'argument' I've heard so far is He can't exist because the primacy of existence says He can't."

*Well, if your god is not conscious, then there's no need for an argument. Your god is as non-conscious as a rock.*

First, you asked me to justify something that your position should be defining. I responded by simply pointing out that maybe the definition shouldn't include the divine, in which case the primacy of existence doesn't preclude His existence. You responded with a conditional about God's consciousness as if that were something I should be concerned with? Remember, it is your axiom we're talking about.

*Yes, new converts just happened to be schooled in what you believe today. Okay. Got it.*

How did you come to this conclusion? Nope, it apparently hasn't gotten through yet. :-)

[December 11, 2008 7:53 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "You realize John himself mentions the Holy Spirit's activity prior to this statement right?"

So what? John makes it clear that "the Comforter will not come" to the disciples until after Jesus had "gone" (I'm supposing the author had the ascension in mind here). You referenced John 1:32, which has the Holy Spirit "descend from heaven like a dove," apparently landing on Jesus. I don't think the author of John considered this in conflict with the statement he puts into Jesus' mouth that the Comforter (Holy Spirit) will not come until after he's gone away. Ultimately it's an imaginary element in the gospel story, and it seems that the authors of the gospels did not have a fully developed understanding of the Holy Spirit ("pneumatology"). Hence the clumsy treatment of the Holy Spirit throughout the narrative. It makes appearances here and there, before Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, but then the gospel has Jesus say explicitly, "if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7). That John presents a different tradition about the delivery of the Holy Spirit (20:22) than the one we read in Acts 2, only confirms that the gospels were compiled from different traditions.

As for your mock dialogue about the inheritance, I don't see the Holy Spirit and your father's wealth as commensurable. I would never infer from the statement "until my father dies, I will not receive his inheritance," that "your father never gave you anything before he died."

David (earlier): "If I find myself reading a passage and being motivated to truly love my neighbor as myself, even when it doesn't benefit me, that is a good hint something is going on."

I asked: *So it's a feeling? How long does it last?*

David: "A change of character is not a feeling, and I have yet to see it cease."

I was asking about what you described above. You mentioned "being motivated" to do something, specifically experience an emotion (love). You didn't feel this? What you described sure resembles a feeling. It's okay if it is. I was just asking.

I wrote: *Yes, that's what other believers have told me. They claim to be "moved" by the Holy Spirit. But above you seem to be saying that believers who claim to be led and taught by the Holy Spirit in their lives are wrong.*

David: "Let me just make a general observation here. You seem to always want to force simplistic definitions or understandings onto things so you can easily dismiss them as contradiction or incoherent. I think it's what you're doing with John 16, and I also think you're doing it here. Just thought I'd let you know that's what it appears like to me. It is almost as if your mind searches for the easiest possible way to defeat something, and you go with it.

It is really interesting, but sometimes results in a complete misunderstanding or misrepresentation of what another person is saying.”

I’m not sure how you got this impression, especially in the case of the present point about other believers claiming to be “moved” by the Holy Spirit. I’m not trying to “force simplistic definitions or understandings” onto anything here. I’m simply trying to get an understanding, from you, on the role of the Holy Spirit in your life. I’ve known many Christians personally who have claimed that they were being led and taught by the Holy Spirit in their lives. When I asked you, “*Would you say that believers who claim to be led and taught by the Holy Spirit in their lives are wrong?*” your unexplained response was: “Yup.” When you stated, “The process of being transformed is really where it becomes more apparent to move believers I think,” that’s when I was reminded, again, of what other believers have told me, that the Holy Spirit leads and teaches them in their lives. They obviously considered this part of “the process of being transformed,” and they thought it was very apparent to them, especially in that they believed they were being led and taught by the Holy Spirit as an integral part of that process. I didn’t think I was trying “to force simplistic definitions or understandings” here at all. Your words do seem to conflict with what other believers have told me (in fact, you seem to be calling them liars for making the claim they make), so that’s why I inquired.

David (earlier): “Perhaps you would say self-generated cognition is the culprit.”

I wrote: *I’m just wondering how one can distinguish the two, especially if he’s anxious to believe that he’s among the chosen and wants to view his life as one being favored by his god.*

David: “If you’re referring to me in particular I would disagree with your assessment of my thinking. But then again, if atheism is true why should we even care to distinguish? What difference does it make if my perceptions are not properly reflective of reality? This is an honest question. Why should I care about truth in an atheist world?”

It seems you’re trying to deflect from my question. We can discuss your question another time (we have so much already on the plate as it is now). You say you disagree with my assessment of your thinking. Do you believe that you’re among the chosen, and doesn’t salvation doubt ever make you anxious about this? Do you not want to see your life as one being favored by your god? Again, I’m just curious how one who claims that his reading of the bible’s teachings is being illuminated by the Holy Spirit, distinguishes what he calls “illuminated by the Holy Spirit” from something he may be doing himself. If you don’t know how or have a hard time explaining it, that’s fine.

I wrote: *I’m not sure why you would say this in response to my question. Apparently you don’t think other believers could be more in-tune with the Holy Spirit’s guidance in their lives than you are? I’m not sure why it’s either-or here: either they aren’t in-tune with the Holy Spirit’s guidance more than you are, or if they are (or claim to be), then the bible is false. Is that what you meant to indicate?*

David: “I’m saying that if the Holy Spirit is acting in contradiction to what the Bible teaches about Him, then that means we aren’t talking about the Holy Spirit as described in the Bible.”

Do you think the possibility that other believers may be more in-tune with the Holy Spirit’s guidance in their lives than you are, would contradict anything in the Bible?

David: “1. “To say...inclines the passage to the interpretation” - this is merely a rewording of the base assertion you are trying to defend, namely that “heard him gladly” implies some understanding which the disciples lacked. They could have been satisfied in any number of ways, so it is also vague with respect to what you are trying to establish.”

My statement here was a rewording of what I had earlier indicated, precisely because I thought I needed to explain it to you in a different way.

David: “2. “I wouldn’t expect this kind of reaction” - how is this relevant to whether or not it is true?”

Recall that you had stated, “I really don’t think we can infer one way or the other about how the masses interpreted his words.” Whereas the discussion is not around “how the masses interpreted his words,” but around whether or not they understood him (contra Jesus’ expressed policy that he deliberately wanted to keep outsiders in the dark), my response to this was that the text does give us some basis for making an inference here. When the text says that “the common people heard him gladly,” this is generally not the kind of reaction

people have when they're confused by what they've heard. Consequently I wouldn't expect people to react this way. That's the relevance. I thought I had made this clear, and that you could, in the interest of charity, understand what I was getting at.

David: "3. 'I do think what it does give us provides a basis for reliable inference' - again in the study of ancient texts and exegesis, how exactly do you define 'reliable inference.' Do you think that because the text suggests it, or because it supports your theory?"

I think the text suggests it, as I have explained. You think it means something else. Fine. I've already pointed to other examples where outsiders understood Jesus' teaching in parables, in spite of his stated policy to the contrary.

I wrote: *That's true - this was a time when miracle-workers were a-plenty. They were counterparts to today's stand-up comedians in a way, providing entertainment, often for free.*

David: "And I think this works against your position, because if that is true then we have less reason to expect the crowd to 'hear him gladly' in a way that implies understanding as opposed to entertainment or mere herd-like behavior."

Maybe so. If that's the case, it would seem to be evidence within the New Testament which confirms that Richard Carrier is correct when [he writes](#):

**the age of Jesus was not an age of critical reflection and remarkable religious acumen. It was an era filled with con artists, gullible believers, martyrs without a cause, and reputed miracles of every variety.**

I wrote: *You're confusing yourself here, David. Wells is not disagreeing that Mark portrays outsiders as understanding Jesus. At various points they do, in spite of Jesus' expressed intention to keep them blinded or hardened (an intention which itself seems pretty hard-hearted). Wells is pointing out how preachers tend to explain outsiders' non-acceptance of the message preached. Outsiders can and often do understand what they are being told to believe, but when they fail to be persuaded the preacher has a canned, self-serving explanation for this ready to deploy.*

David: "I am not sure how that Wells quote has any bearing on our discussion? You had just said, 'So Mark portrays the inner circle as repeatedly failing to understand Jesus' teachings while outsiders often get it, completely opposite his announced policy in 4:11-12.' Then you said, 'Of course, it is not difficult to understand why a preacher would be motivated to construe outsiders as blind.' You gave an example about outsiders and preachers as well, but how does this relate to our discussion of John 16 and your previous statement about Mark 4?"

It's germane to the part of Jesus' policy in which he wants to keep outsiders blinded and hardened. Outsiders play a role for Mark, though not always a consistent one. Outsiders also play a role for preachers outside of Mark. Their failure to be persuaded by what is preached is characterized as an outcome intended by a supernatural being who's calling all the shots.

I asked: *What is an "infinite consciousness"? Where do you get such an idea? To what does it refer? Why would you suppose there is such a thing? How did you form your concept of consciousness, and from what inputs, such that it makes sense to describe something as an "infinite consciousness"? Is an "infinite consciousness" something that we can only imagine? Or is there some objective method by which we can apprehend it?*

David: "a) the theistic God b) His revelation of Himself in the Bible c) the theistic God d) consciousness is the ability to perceive the subject-object relationship. e) rationality f) no g) As with anything, by reason."

These responses are not helpful. Did you intend them to be? I still don't understand what "infinite consciousness" means or what it's supposed to refer to. The notion "the theistic God" has no objective reference. I can imagine something along these lines, but the imaginary is not real and does not supply objective input to inform an idea. I can see that you got the idea from a storybook, which suggests that you do not come to knowledge of it by independent reasoning. But you fail to explain how you formed your concept of consciousness, and from what inputs, such that it makes sense to describe something as an "infinite consciousness" (whatever that is supposed to mean). Also, how would I be able to distinguish what you call "infinite consciousness" from what you may merely be imagining? You say that you can apprehend this "infinite consciousness" by means of reason, but reason is the faculty by which we identify and integrate what we perceive. Do you perceive your god? Do you have direct awareness of it? Or do you infer its existence from other

things you perceive? Perception gives awareness of things that are material, natural or man-made, finite and corruptible. But the Christian god is said to be immaterial, supernatural (and specifically not man-made), infinite and incorruptible. So this needs additional explanation. Perhaps you just read a storybook full of imaginative tales and adventures and simply believe it?

I wrote: *My system does not assert something called an “infinite consciousness.” So why should I have to explain what it is? You’re the one who’s apparently endorsing such a notion. So why not explain it?*

David: “The axiom states that existence is independent of human and divine consciousness. Is it not the onus of the one who holds a position to explain exactly what the terms mean? Your position makes the assertion, therefore your position should define the term.”

If you’re asking me to define the concept ‘consciousness’, you ask amiss. The concept ‘consciousness’ is an axiomatic concept. Axiomatic concepts are not defined in terms of prior concepts; there could be no prior concepts. Axiomatic concepts are defined ostensively. As for the primacy of existence, it states that existence exists independent of consciousness. You acknowledged your own understanding of this earlier. What else needs to be defined? I have no onus of defining the notion of an “infinite consciousness” if that’s what you are asking me to define, since this is not a notion which my position affirms. You introduced the notion, and when asked to explain it, you pointed to something that is literally nonsensical (“the theistic God”).

I should note that the primacy of existence also has broad and all-encompassing epistemological implications. For instance, since the objects of consciousness hold metaphysical primacy over the subject of consciousness (the objects are what they are regardless of what the subject knows, wishes, fears, etc.), there is a fundamental distinction between what exists and what we imagine. We need to take this distinction into account in our quest for knowledge. If someone makes a claim about reality which conflicts with previously validated knowledge, it may be the case that he’s confused what he imagines with what is actually real.

I wrote: *Well, it depends what the term “laws of nature” is supposed to denote. If it denotes a physical force or set of physical forces which exist, and they in fact exist, then in my book they exist. That’s existence. Existence exists. So we need to be clear about what we’re talking about. That’s all I’m saying. Do you object to this?*

David: “Well this is about Objectivism’s position in relation to cosmology so my objections are irrelevant. On the model I referred to, the laws of physics are the necessary condition that precedes the singularity popping into existence. Thus we have laws before we have matter. But do the laws exist? If they do, then we have an invariant abstract universal entity. I don’t think atheists are going to allow that (it sounds too much like God).”

Again, as I’ve mentioned at least twice before now, it is important to understand what “the laws of physics” (or “the laws of nature”) are supposed to denote. Do they denote forces? Do they denote descriptions? This remains unclear. You seem to be saying that the laws are “an abstract universal entity,” though I’m not sure how you got that. Then you say that “it sounds too much like God,” but I don’t see how that could be the case. Christians tell me that their god is a “concrete universal,” and expressly reject the notion that it is an “abstract universal,” which is what you seem to think it must be. For instance, Christian apologist [Mike Warren writes](#):

**Only an absolutely rational God escapes Kant’s criticism—a God who is the source of all the diversity in life as well as all unity, one who is a concrete universal, not an abstract universal.**

So even if one might mistakenly think “it sounds too much like God,” if what I’ve been told by Christian apologists is true, then it surely could not be the Christian god.

Here’s a question: are these “laws of physics” a *conscious* entity?

I wrote: *No, not “subtract.” That implies it was there all along, which is deliberately spurious. We simply have no need to factor into our view arbitrary notions, whether it be the Christian god, the Muslim’s Allah, the Hindu’s Brahman, the Lahu’s Geusha, etc. You’re taking this so personally.*

David: “I’m taking this personally, how so?”

By worrying about your god specifically, and not seeing the bigger picture.

David: “Whatever divine consciousness entails, I’m pretty sure it is in no way comparable with a human.”

I wrote: *Fine. Then what justifies calling it consciousness? What justifies the use of the same concept to denote it?*

David: "Maybe nothing, in which case the axiom has no bearing on the theistic God, and thus your claim that His existence is metaphysically impossible seems to have no support. The only 'argument' I've heard so far is He can't exist because the primacy of existence says He can't."

I wrote: *Well, if your god is not conscious, then there's no need for an argument. Your god is as non-conscious as a rock.*

David: "First, you asked me to justify something that your position should be defining. I responded by simply pointing out that maybe the definition shouldn't include the divine, in which case the primacy of existence doesn't preclude His existence. You responded with a conditional about God's consciousness as if that were something I should be concerned with? Remember, it is your axiom we're talking about."

What should my position be defining? On the one hand you attribute consciousness to your god ("divine consciousness"), but in the same breathe you say "it is in no way comparable with a human." So I asked what justifies calling it consciousness. We both agree that human beings have consciousness, right? Then you say your god's alleged consciousness "is in no way comparable with a human." You say "maybe nothing" justifies calling it consciousness, in order to escape the primacy of existence. But if nothing justifies attributing consciousness to your god, this may be because it isn't conscious. In which case, there's no need for an argument. A non-conscious god is an inert idol.

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 12, 2008 11:46 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Ok the back and forth one lining is getting a bit lengthy, so I will just summarize what we've covered. If there are questions you still want answered, feel free.

Regarding your question about the Holy Spirit: the point I am trying to underscore is that the Bible is the primary source Christians in all matters of faith and practice. You seem disappointed at my "unexplained response" but if you read my prior comment you will see I have already covered it. "I don't believe the Holy Spirit teaches individuals new doctrine. The Bible itself claims to be the final authority and revelation, inspired by the Holy Spirit." So in the sense that someone is led that way, I would disagree. In the sense that someone is led to love their neighbor, they indeed may be more in-tune (sanctified) than I. My point is that "in-tune with the Holy Spirit" must be commensurate with what the Bible teaches. Your original statement was, "Could it be that there are believers who are more in-tune with the Holy Spirit's guidance in their lives than you are? Maybe you are trying too hard to rely on your own understanding ("pneumatology") while other believers are "letting go and letting God?" What you seemed to be saying was that I should concentrate less on exegeting the Bible and more on "letting go and letting God." My response was intended to underscore the fact that if "letting go and letting God" means letting go of Scripture, then there is a serious problem.

It is strange that you keep mentioning that you know Christians who believe such and such. I know "Christians" who don't believe in the resurrection. So what? That doesn't imply anything about the truth of the matter. Also with respect to your characterization of my position as "calling them liars for making the claim they make," I would probably prefer to reserve that term for someone who intentionally states a mistruth. I would merely consider someone mistaken in that context.

*Do you believe that you're among the chosen, and doesn't salvation doubt ever make you anxious about this?*

I believe that God has chosen some for salvation, but I do not believe that this is as a result of any merit that the person possesses; thus, I wouldn't say God favors me in that sense. We call this unconditional election. Also doubting ones salvation is actually a good indicator.

*Recall that you had stated, "I really don't think we can infer one way or the other about how the masses interpreted his words." Whereas the discussion is not around "how the masses interpreted his words," but around whether or not they understood him (contra Jesus' expressed policy that he deliberately wanted to*



keep outsiders in the dark), my response to this was that the text does give us some basis for making an inference here. When the text says that “the common people heard him gladly,” this is generally not the kind of reaction people have when they’re confused by what they’ve heard. Consequently I wouldn’t expect people to react this way. That’s the relevance. I thought I had made this clear, and that you could, in the interest of charity, understand what I was getting at.

a) You keep saying the text gives us some basis for making an inference, but you have yet to demonstrate this. Simply applying your position to the text doesn’t qualify.

b) When I said “interpreted his words” I was referring to whether or not they understood him. Also, you are appealing to what “is generally the kind of reaction people have.” That is the relevance? Looks like vague wordsmithery to me. Have you yet considered my previous point, i.e. that the people weren’t trying to understand or be confused? As you clearly affirmed, they were hoping to be entertained.

So both of your arguments have been:

1) The “general kind of reaction people have” leads you to expect x.

2) There are other examples in the Gospels of outsiders understanding Jesus’ teaching in parables, in spite of his stated policy to the contrary.

Apropos 1) I have shown (with your express approval) that the masses may have simply been glad to be entertained. Indeed that is the “general kind of reaction people have” in such a context, so you must now agree that “we should expect” this kind of reaction. You seem to think the masses were sitting with legs crossed and critically examining every word, and then somehow the disciples were a step behind. There is simply no basis for the inference, and no matter how many times you repeat your assertion it remains unsubstantiated.

Apropos 2) you have yet to establish this “stated policy to the contrary” via a Biblical reference. Where is this policy? Also what do your examples prove? I can provide examples where outsiders didn’t understand Jesus’ teaching in parables.

*I still don’t understand what “infinite consciousness” means or what it’s supposed to refer to.*

Ok we can work on this. Do you understand what the concept of omnipresence entails?

*The notion “the theistic God” has no objective reference. I can imagine something along these lines, but the imaginary is not real and does not supply objective input to inform an idea.*

When you say “objective input” what do you mean?

*Also, how would I be able to distinguish what you call “infinite consciousness” from what you may merely be imagining?*

Rational argumentation for the existence of an infinite-personal God. There arguments from truth, from consciousness, from apparent design, from desire, from morality, and others besides. See Alvin Plantinga’s [A Dozen of So Theistic Arguments](#)

*You say that you can apprehend this “infinite consciousness” by means of reason, but reason is the faculty by which we identify and integrate what we perceive.*

Previously you stated, “There are things which we will never perceive and yet still exist. Our ability to perceive something is not a precondition of something’s existence.”

In your view, how does reason act upon that which we cannot perceive?

*If you’re asking me to define the concept ‘consciousness’, you ask amiss. The concept ‘consciousness’ is an axiomatic concept. Axiomatic concepts are not defined in terms of prior concepts; there could be no prior concepts. Axiomatic concepts are defined ostensively. As for the primacy of existence, it states that existence exists independent of consciousness. You acknowledged your own understanding of this earlier. What else needs to be defined? I have no onus of defining the notion of an “infinite consciousness” if that’s what you are asking me to define, since this is not a notion which my position affirms. You introduced the notion, and when asked*

*to explain it, you pointed to something that is literally nonsensical ("the theistic God").*

a) Right, so your position denies that existence depends on divine consciousness, but then you refuse to define what a divine consciousness is. Got it.

b) Is the primacy of existence an axiomatic concept? If so, can it reference another axiomatic concept (consciousness)?

c) Please substantiate your claim that the theistic God "is literally nonsensical."

*Again, as I've mentioned at least twice before now, it is important to understand what "the laws of physics" (or "the laws of nature") are supposed to denote. Do they denote forces? Do they denote descriptions? This remains unclear.*

Remember, I'm not talking about my position; I'm referring to a naturalistic model that assumes the singularity began to exist without a cause. In that model, the laws of physics are not descriptions, but I don't think they are forces either. The point is they somehow "exist" according to that model. It may indeed be unclear how such a thing could "exist," since it entails something abstract and universal (assuming there aren't infinite universes).

*You seem to be saying that the laws are "an abstract universal entity," though I'm not sure how you got that. Then you say that "it sounds too much like God," but I don't see how that could be the case. Christians tell me that their god is a "concrete universal," and expressly reject the notion that it is an "abstract universal," which is what you seem to think it must be.*

Don't get distracted by your desire to quarrel. Nothing I said in that paragraph reflects my position.

*By worrying about your god specifically, and not seeing the bigger picture.*

What do you mean "worrying?" Are we having a conversation specifically about the theistic God or not?

*What should my position be defining?*

Divine consciousness

*On the one hand you attribute consciousness to your god ("divine consciousness"), but in the same breathe you say "it is in no way comparable with a human."*

Go back and reread the Rand quote I cited. You appear confused about why we are discussing "divine consciousness."

*But if nothing justifies attributing consciousness to your god, this may be because it isn't conscious. In which case, there's no need for an argument. A non-conscious god is an inert idol.*

You have assumed that a non-conscious being must be less than conscious. Why not super-conscious? When I say conscious, I am specifically talking about the term as defined by your position...so when you talk about my position and the implications it has for it, this shows me you are too busy trying to quarrel instead of thinking this through.

[December 13, 2008 5:37 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

One more quick question which I keep forgetting to pose:

You charge theists with metaphysical subjectivism based on the notion that existence should depend on some consciousness (human or divine).

Now from reading some previous posts, I see that existence is defined as the sum of existents, which I agree with.

**But wait**, if God exists then He does so necessarily and without dependence on any consciousness.

So my question:

How does that violate the primacy of existence if an existent, specifically God, is not the result of consciousness?

[December 14, 2008 11:06 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote: *I still don't understand what "infinite consciousness" means or what it's supposed to refer to.*

David: "Ok we can work on this. Do you understand what the concept of omnipresence entails?"

I don't want to go by my own understanding here, David. If I do, then I could be importing ideas which are foreign to your position. It'd be preferable to avoid this from the beginning. So if you need to explain "infinite consciousness" by reference to something called "omnipresence," you'll have to explain that as well.

I wrote: *The notion "the theistic God" has no objective reference. I can imagine something along these lines, but the imaginary is not real and does not supply objective input to inform an idea.*

David: "When you say 'objective input' what do you mean?"

Evidence from reality gathered according to the norms of reason (which entails compliance with the primacy of existence - i.e., *objective*).

I asked: *Also, how would I be able to distinguish what you call "infinite consciousness" from what you may merely be imagining?*

David: "Rational argumentation for the existence of an infinite-personal God. There arguments from truth, from consciousness, from apparent design, from desire, from morality, and others besides. See Alvin Plantinga's [A Dozen of So Theistic Arguments](#)"

I'm certainly aware that Christian theists have put forward numerous arguments for the existence of the biblical god. But none that I have ever reviewed address my question. One can imagine something that doesn't really exist and still assemble arguments for its existence, all the while failing to explain how one can reliably distinguish what he is arguing for and what he may actually be imagining. Take Plantinga's argument from numbers for example. Plantinga's version goes essentially as follows:

- P1. Numbers are dependent upon or even constituted by intellectual activity such that if there were no minds, there would be no numbers.
- P2. There are too many numbers for them to arise as a result of human activity.
- C. Therefore, we should think of them as among God's ideas.

Now that's a pretty poor argument, and I would say that its most glaring deficiency is the lack of a good understanding of concepts which makes such an argument imaginable. But the same kind of argument could be used for establishing the existence of Blarko, an imaginary being:

- P1. Numbers are dependent upon or even constituted by intellectual activity such that if there were no minds, there would be no numbers.
- P2. There are too many numbers for them to arise as a result of human activity.
- C. Therefore, we should think of them as among Blarko's ideas.

Similarly, the Lahu tribe could easily incorporate a version of Plantinga's argument from induction for the existence of Geusha, the supreme being of their religious worship:

"Hume pointed out that human beings are inclined to accept inductive forms of reasoning and thus to take it for granted, in a way, that the future will relevantly resemble the past. As Hume also pointed out, however, it is hard to think of a good (noncircular) reason for believing that indeed the future will be relevantly like the past. Geushism, however, provides a reason: Geusha has created us and our noetic capacities and has created the world; he has also created the former in such a way as to be adapted to the latter. It is likely, then, that Geusha has created the world in such a way that in fact the future will indeed resemble the past in the relevant way."

Then there's the moral argument:

P1. Morality is objective, not dependent upon what human beings know or think.

P2. Morality cannot be explained in terms of any "natural" facts about human beings or other things; it cannot ultimately be explained in terms of physical, chemical or biological facts.

C. Therefore there could be no such objective moral facts unless there were such a person as Geusha who, in one way or another legislates them.

Now I think Geusha is as imaginary as Yahweh, Jehovah, Jesus, Baal, Blarko, Doot-Eckies, Primriezanon, Prapbubenjao, Ahura Mazda, Allah, Osiris, Horus, Odin, etc. One could assemble arguments for their existence, sure. But in the end, we're talking about imaginary things.

David: "In your view, how does reason act upon that which we cannot perceive?"

I'm not sure what you're asking. Specifically, I'm not sure what "act upon" is supposed to mean here. We can infer the existence of things which we cannot directly perceive, such as a planet orbiting a nearby star. But such inferences must at minimum comply with the primacy of existence (which precludes any blurring of the distinction between what is real and what is imaginary). For instance, when the Lahu tribesmen say that Geusha created the universe (one of their claims) and animated the snake and elephant with Na'an-la (a kind of spirit force as I understand it), I don't think they're using reason.

David: "a) Right, so your position denies that existence depends on divine consciousness, but then you refuse to define what a divine consciousness is. Got it."

Ah, I see. You're looking for a definition of 'divine consciousness'. I don't think there is a definition of this per se. It's a description which makes use of a legitimate concept (the concept 'consciousness') which is supposed to refer to an entity which is *sui generis*, which means it is not a concept nor do concepts apply. Definitions are properties of concepts, not of entities. Concepts are formed on the basis of two or more units which possess certain similarities isolated by a process of abstraction. Since there's supposed, on the Christian view anyway, to be only one "God," the term "God" would not be a concept. The fact that we have a more generic word "god" which is used as a concept (really, a pseudo-concept, since it is not integrating anything that actually exists, but has its content in the imagination) only shows how pliable the notion really is. Anyway, I digress. The notion "divine consciousness" refers to an imaginary consciousness: "It is an isolation of actual characteristics of man [e.g., awareness, volition, memory, emotion, thought, etc.] combined with the projection of impossible, irrational characteristics which do not arise from reality, such as omnipotence and omniscience." (Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 148). So I would say Rand is correct: the universe was not created by man's consciousness or by the consciousness of something which men imagine.

David: "b) Is the primacy of existence an axiomatic concept? If so, can it reference another axiomatic concept (consciousness)?"

The primacy of existence is a fundamental truth which is informed by and a corollary of the axiomatic concepts.

David: "c) Please substantiate your claim that the theistic God 'is literally nonsensical'."

It is supposed to be an independently existing entity which, by the very description theists give to it, could never be perceived via the senses.

I wrote: *Again, as I've mentioned at least twice before now, it is important to understand what "the laws of physics" (or "the laws of nature") are supposed to denote. Do they denote forces? Do they denote descriptions? This remains unclear.*

David: "Remember, I'm not talking about my position; I'm referring to a naturalistic model that assumes the singularity began to exist without a cause. In that model, the laws of physics are not descriptions, but I don't think they are forces either. The point is they somehow 'exist' according to that model."

My point is simply that unless it's clear what "the laws of physics" are supposed to denote, the theory is subject to certain hazards, such as leading to the primacy of consciousness.

I wrote: *But if nothing justifies attributing consciousness to your god, this may be because it isn't conscious. In*

*which case, there's no need for an argument. A non-conscious god is an inert idol.*

David: "You have assumed that a non-conscious being must be less than conscious."

I'm not sure what you mean by "less than conscious" here. It's not a matter of degrees that I have in mind. If something does not possess consciousness, it is non-consciousness.

David: "Why not super-conscious?"

While we're at it, why not super-duper-consciousness? Or macro-conscious? Or macaroni-conscious? Or ginormous-conscious? Or hemi-demi-semi-quaver-conscious? If we open the concept up to the imaginary, why stop with merely "super-conscious"?

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 14, 2008 11:17 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "But wait, if God exists then He does so necessarily and without dependence on any consciousness."

This only shows that the primacy of existence is inescapable. It does not demonstrate that the notion of a god is compliant with the primacy of existence.

David: "So my question: How does that violate the primacy of existence if an existent, specifically God, is not the result of consciousness?"

Thorn gives several examples of this in his Argument from the Fact of Existence. Also, see my blog [Confessions of a Vantillian Subjectivist](#) for some more explicit points on this.

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 14, 2008 11:18 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

David: "But wait, if God exists then He does so necessarily and without dependence on any consciousness."

Dawson: "This only shows that the primacy of existence is inescapable. It does not demonstrate that the notion of a god is compliant with the primacy of existence."

How does it "not demonstrate that the notion of god is compliant?"

I think it clearly does. Now we've both made assertions. But I already made my case, care to make yours? If I am incorrect in my logic regarding the primacy of existence and God's existence, then it should be quite easy for you to demonstrate how the notion of God doesn't comply with the primacy of existence.

[December 14, 2008 11:53 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "How does it 'not demonstrate that the notion of god is compliant'?"

A notion can show that the primacy of existence is inescapable while not complying with the primacy of existence in terms of its content. The content of the notion "God" affirms metaphysical primacy to the subject in the the subject-object relationship in the case of objects other than itself (precisely the opposite orientation we enjoy with respect to the objects of our consciousness). So while the theist may make the claim that "God exists necessarily without depending on any consciousness," he still affirms the primacy of consciousness in that

other objects are supposed to depend on its consciousness, either for their very existence (it “created” them ex nihilo) and/or for their identity, which it can alter at will (e.g., miracles). I gave you a link to a blog of mine which gives some pointers on this. Also, Thorn’s essay on the issue of metaphysical primacy discusses the distinction between performatively assuming the primacy of existence and violating it in the content of one’s claims. You may want to review these. I don’t see any reason why I should need to repeat what has already been spelled out.

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 14, 2008 1:10 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Oh so it is your position that no existent depends on [consciousness?](#)

[December 14, 2008 11:38 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

*But the same kind of argument could be used for establishing the existence of Blarko, an imaginary being:*

The swapping of a word does not affect the argument, since the attributes of the entity which that word references are precisely whats in question. You can call God anything you want, if as Leibniz’s principle states, He possesses exactly the same attributes under each name.

[December 14, 2008 11:42 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

This post has been removed by the author.

[December 14, 2008 11:45 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote: *But the same kind of argument could be used for establishing the existence of Blarko, an imaginary being:*

David: “The swapping of a word does not affect the argument, since the attributes of the entity which that word references are precisely whats in question. You can call God anything you want, if as Leibniz’s principle states, He possesses exactly the same attributes under each name.”

I see. So when Christians argue that their god exist, they’re also arguing that Allah exists, that Geusha exists, that Osiris exists, that Horus exists, that Ahura Mazda exists, that Doot-Eckies exists, etc.? They all possess the same attributes, regardless of name? That’s odd. Geusha did not have a son. But I thought this was integral to the Christian god.

I wrote: *It is supposed to be an independently existing entity which, by the very description theists give to it, could never be perceived via the senses.*

David: “So then Gpd think it nonsensical because He can’t be perceived via the senses?”

It is just as I stated. Christians have repeatedly stipulated that their god cannot be perceived via the senses. This is such a widespread claim among Christians that I assume you ascribe to it. Am I wrong here? Also, it’s supposed to be an independently existing entity, as are rocks, mountains, fence posts, doorknobs, broomsticks, etc. Is that not the case? I can perceive these other things, but I’m supposed to believe that an entity which I will never be able to perceive exists (and created the universe and rules all of history, to boot). One could make these kinds of claims about anything he’s imagining. But curiously, those who claim this give me no good explanation on how I can reliably distinguish between what he calls “God” and what he may merely be imagining. So far, you are no exception to this, David.

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 15, 2008 10:09 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

*I see. So when Christians argue that their god exist, they're also arguing that Allah exists, that Geusha exists, that Osiris exists, that Horus exists, that Ahura Mazda exists, that Doot-Eckies exists, etc.? They all possess the same attributes, regardless of name? That's odd. Geusha did not have a son. But I thought this was integral to the Christian god.*

Its pretty simple Dawson, they don't share the same attributes. I'm very suprised to see this kind of response from you.

*I can perceive these other things, but I'm supposed to believe that an entity which I will never be able to perceive exists*

Here I'll just allow you to answer your own question:

"There are things which we will never perceive and yet still exist. Our ability to perceive something is not a precondition of something's existence."

*But curiously, those who claim this give me no good explanation on how I can reliably distinguish between what he calls "God" and what he may merely be imagining. So far, you are no exception to this, David.*

Curiously, Objectivists rant on and on about how God is metaphysically impossible, but none of them can quite demonstrate it. Even when they reference the primacy of existence, they seem to presume upon an unjustified inference from "existence exists" to "all existents exists without dependence on consciousness." An interesting proposition for sure, but one which has not been established. So far, you are no exception to this, Dawson.

[December 15, 2008 10:21 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David (earlier): "You can call God anything you want, if as Leibniz's principle states, He possesses exactly the same attributes under each name."

*I wrote: So when Christians argue that their god exist, they're also arguing that Allah exists, that Geusha exists, that Osiris exists, that Horus exists, that Ahura Mazda exists, that Doot-Eckies exists, etc.? They all possess the same attributes, regardless of name? That's odd. Geusha did not have a son. But I thought this was integral to the Christian god.*

David: "Its pretty simple Dawson, they don't share the same attributes. I'm very suprised to see this kind of response from you."

So, the bogeyman does not "possess the same attributes under each name"? Either each alleged being which I swap in and out of the arguments for "God's" existence "possesses exactly the same attributes under each name" ("as Leibniz's principle states"), or they don't. I don't think they do.

*I wrote: I can perceive these other things, but I'm supposed to believe that an entity which I will never be able to perceive exists (and created the universe and rules all of history, to boot).*

David: "Here I'll just allow you to answer your own question: 'There are things which we will never perceive and yet still exist. Our ability to perceive something is not a precondition of something's existence'."

I stand by both statements, David. There are things which I will never perceive which do exist (such as a planet orbiting a nearby star, which is the example I gave). I will probably never see the city of Lagos. But I accept its existence. The existence of planets and cities which I have never seen does not contradict anything that I do know (i.e., validated knowledge). But the claim that a consciousness created its own objects, does contradict knowledge which I have validated (it contradicts the primacy of existence, which you've not shown to be false;



indeed, you acknowledged its truth). So I have a standard, one which slashes off arbitrary notions like your god. That disturbs you. Tough. Get over it or move on.

I wrote: *But curiously, those who claim this give me no good explanation on how I can reliably distinguish between what he calls "God" and what he may merely be imagining. So far, you are no exception to this, David.*

David: "Curiously, Objectivists rant on and on about how God is metaphysically impossible, but none of them can quite demonstrate it."

What other Objectivists do you have in mind? Indeed, few Objectivists spend any time on religion. The only other one that I know of who has devoted much attention to this topic is Anton Thorn, and he produced an argument (with numbered premises and all), showing how the Christian god specifically violates the primacy of existence and therefore concludes how claims that it exists must be false. What else do you want so far as a "demonstration"? As I had pointed out to you earlier, we have no onus to prove that the non-existent does not exist.

I think you're done, David. You offer nothing new. Your objections have been answered. If I am no exception to the likes of Thorn and other Objectivists, happy am I. Indeed, you flatter me! You're done here, but you flatter me upon leaving. Thank you!

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 15, 2008 11:00 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

*So, the bogeyman does not "possess the same attributes under each name"? Either each alleged being which I swap in and out of the arguments for "God's" existence "possesses exactly the same attributes under each name" ("as Leibniz's principle states"), or they don't. I don't think they do.*

Good, you just refuted yourself.

"But the same kind of argument could be used for establishing the existence of Blarko, an imaginary being."

Clearly it cannot, and you've just shown why. All of Plantinga's arguments are referencing the theistic God specifically, so when you try to plug in something else (Leibniz's principle says that "something else" is anything which does not possess all the same attributes) the argument no longer works.

*But the claim that a consciousness created its own objects, does contradict knowledge which I have validated (it contradicts the primacy of existence, which you've not shown to be false; indeed, you acknowledged its truth). So I have a standard, one which slashes off arbitrary notions like your god. That disturbs you. Tough. Get over it or move on.*

Oh look, Dawson is upset so he's trying to bully me around with his rhetoric. Boo hoo, I'm so upset that he has defined God out of existence.

If you have knowledge that contradicts that "a consciousness created its own objects," then you haven't shared it. We agree with respect to human consciousness, but your standard is simply unjustified with respect to divine consciousness.

*As I had pointed out to you earlier, we have no onus to prove that the non-existent does not exist.*

Right, as Drew Lewis and I have both pointed out now, you simply define God out of existence and then persist to build arguments on it.

*I think you're done, David. You offer nothing new. Your objections have been answered. If I am no exception to the likes of Thorn and other Objectivists, happy am I. Indeed, you flatter me! You're done here, but you flatter me upon leaving. Thank you!*

Oh brother, you always run away just when I'm getting at some good questions. I don't think you even took the time to understand my objections. Oh well, fine with me. All the questions you couldn't answer can always be

directed at Mr. Thorn.

You have dodged enough questions to convince me you are bluffing.

[December 15, 2008 1:14 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "Clearly it cannot, and you've just shown why. All of Plantinga's arguments are referencing the theistic God specifically,"

I don't see anything in Plantinga's arguments which is contextually limiting in this way such that they cannot be modified to accommodate rival imaginary beings.

David: "so when you try to plug in something else (Leibniz's principle says that 'something else' is anything which does not possess all the same attributes) the argument no longer works."

So when someone argues that objective morality exists, but cannot be explained in terms of physical, chemical or biological facts, what about this argument necessitates concluding with the "theistic god" instead of Geusha? Why does the argument no longer work when it tries to conclude that Geusha exists instead of the Christian god, for instance?

David: "We agree with respect to human consciousness, but your standard is simply unjustified with respect to divine consciousness."

You have not justified the assertion of the reality of something called "divine consciousness." To do this, your epistemology cannot depart from the primacy of existence, which you have conceded in the case of human consciousness. You've not shown how you can conclude that there is a "divine consciousness" while remaining loyal to the primacy of existence. Meanwhile, you do not explain how one can reliably distinguish between what you call "divine consciousness" and what you may merely be imagining. That's not my problem, David.

David: "Right, as Drew Lewis and I have both pointed out now, you simply define God out of existence and then persist to build arguments on it."

If that's what you think, then you've stated what you think. What else do you want now? I've defended my definitions in both cases, and neither of you have been able to bring any sustaining criticisms against them. As for Drew Lewis, he thought my argument was trying to prove that god does not exist. He missed the point completely.

David: "Oh brother, you always run away just when I'm getting at some good questions."

No, you're not "getting at some good questions," David. You're going around and around and around again, over ground which has been tilled numerous times. I've referred you to resources which answer your questions, but you seem unwilling to review them, or unable to understand them. But you've brought nothing new to the conversation. It's gotten old and unproductive. As Breakerslion said of you earlier on, the denial is strong with this one. What else do you want?

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 15, 2008 3:16 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

*So when someone argues that objective morality exists, but cannot be explained in terms of physical, chemical or biological facts, what about this argument necessitates concluding with the "theistic god" instead of Geusha? Why does the argument no longer work when it tries to conclude that Geusha exists instead of the Christian god, for instance?*

Obviously each theistic argument has its own terms. Since Geusha operates in the context of theistic animism, often it may be the case that a particular theistic argument supports the existence of some being with

ambiguous reference to several possible gods....but the theistic arguments converge on the Christian God.

However, your original example was “Blarko,” and you what you tried to demonstrate was that you could simply put a different word in the argument and get the same result...some imaginary being exists. What I am pointing out is that names don’t matter, **terms** do.

*You have not justified the assertion of the reality of something called “divine consciousness.”*

Your position asserts that existence **does not** rely on “divine consciousness.” Why should I justify assertions regarding your position? The conclusion of our discussion is that you have no explanation for why/how existence exists independently of a divine consciousness. So maybe all my theistic arguments were unconvincing to you (and unexamined since you just assumed the conclusion metaphysically impossible). In this case, really all we can say is that both sides are unsubstantiated.

Conclusion: you haven't show

[December 15, 2008 4:08 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I asked: *Why does the argument no longer work when it tries to conclude that Geusha exists instead of the Christian god, for instance?*

David: “Obviously each theistic argument has its own terms. Since Geusha operates in the context of theistic animism, often it may be the case that a particular theistic argument supports the existence of some being with ambiguous reference to several possible gods....but the theistic arguments converge on the Christian God.”

I used Plantinga’s arguments from morality and induction to argue for the existence of Geusha. It seems you’re saying here that they can work for this purpose. If not, why not? Why would the “arguments converge on the Christian God,” and not on Geusha or some other supernatural agent?

David: “However, your original example was ‘Blarko’, and you what you tried to demonstrate was that you could simply put a different word in the argument and get the same result...some imaginary being exists. What I am pointing out is that names don’t matter, terms do.”

By replacing “god” with “Blarko” I showed how the same arguments could be used to conclude that something known to be imaginary exists. That’s what I’m pointing out, and you’ve not shown how the “theistic arguments” recover from this profoundly debilitating malady.

David: “Your position asserts that existence does not rely on ‘divine consciousness’.”

Yes, and I addressed this when I stated:

The notion “divine consciousness” refers to an imaginary consciousness: “It is an isolation of actual characteristics of man [e.g., awareness, volition, memory, emotion, thought, etc.] combined with the projection of impossible, irrational characteristics which do not arise from reality, such as omnipotence and omniscience.” (Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 148). So I would say Rand is correct: the universe was not created by man’s consciousness or by the consciousness of something which men imagine.

Existence does not depend on consciousness, either real (as in the case of biological organisms) or imaginary (as in the case of alleged supernatural entities). If you think that existence depends on consciousness, then you’re welcome to present your case for this. But since you have already acknowledged the truth of the primacy of existence at least in the case of human consciousness, your case will need to be consistent with this point.

David: “The conclusion of our discussion is that you have no explanation for why/how existence exists independently of a divine consciousness.”

That’s simply wrong, David. I gave my explanation earlier, and I have repeated it above.

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 15, 2008 4:29 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

The theistic arguments converge on the Christian God because when taken as a whole they demonstrate (via their conclusions) the Christian God's attributes.

*By replacing "god" with "Blarko" I showed how the same arguments could be used to conclude that something known to be imaginary exists. That's what I'm pointing out, and you've not shown how the "theistic arguments" recover from this profoundly debilitating malady.*

Wow, more bully tactics. Who is Blarko? Does He possess the attributes subsumed under the term "God" in those arguments? Is Blarko just a word that references the same attributes as the Christian God?

And that Rand quote was just more proof that all you have are assertions.

[December 15, 2008 5:41 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "The theistic arguments converge on the Christian God because when taken as a whole they demonstrate (via their conclusions) the Christian God's attributes."

Of course, one could say this about anything that is imaginary.

*I wrote: By replacing "god" with "Blarko" I showed how the same arguments could be used to conclude that something known to be imaginary exists. That's what I'm pointing out, and you've not shown how the "theistic arguments" recover from this profoundly debilitating malady.*

David: "Wow, more bully tactics. Who is Blarko? Does He possess the attributes subsumed under the term "God" in those arguments? Is Blarko just a word that references the same attributes as the Christian God?"

"Bully tactics"? Do you feel bullied? Blarko has whatever attributes one wants to imagine it has. It could have the attributes of being able to create ex nihilo, to send worldwide floods, to be angry at the Amalekites, to incarnate itself, etc.

David: "And that Rand quote was just more proof that all you have are assertions."

Actually, it shows that I had answered you earlier when in fact you claimed I did not.

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 15, 2008 7:12 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

I wrote: "The theistic arguments converge on the Christian God because when taken as a whole they demonstrate (via their conclusions) the Christian God's attributes."

Dawson: *Of course, one could say this about anything that is imaginary.*

Is your position really that theistic arguments can prove the existence of "anything that is imaginary?" Or do you mean in general a series of arguments can converge on to show something imaginary allegedly exists? This sounds like a rendition of Bertand Russell's [celestial teapot](#).

Assuming you mean in general, are there any convergent arguments for other beings you deem imaginary (unicorns, tooth fairy, santa claus)? If it is as easy as you claim to argue for the imaginary, I would expect to find all sorts of instances outside of the arena of theism.

*"Bully tactics"? Do you feel bullied?*

Yes, and I'm not the [first](#) to call attention to your behavior. "Profoundly debilitating malady" is quite a phrase to describe something your imagination has created, namely a mischaracterization of the theistic arguments. You appear to be convinced that you've "shown" something by replacing the word "God" with the word "Blarko." We can plug words into arguments all day long, but this doesn't do justice to serious inquiry into well-formed deductive premises and their conclusion - school yard tactics.

*Blarko has whatever attributes one wants to imagine it has. It could have the attributes of being able to create ex nihilo, to send worldwide floods, to be angry at the Amalekites, to incarnate itself, etc.*

Now we're back where we started. In order for any given theistic argument to support Blarko's existence, he would need the attributes specific to that argument. So ok, we have "created" an imaginary being named Blarko and given him all the attributes required for the arguments to work- ahem...the attributes of the theistic God. If all of them converged on Blarko, then Blarko is compatible with the theistic God. So either Blarko is the type of God the arguments target or he isn't. Using a different word shows nothing. In fact, to get the arguments to work you still have to copy over the attributes from the theistic God. How asinine is that?

*Actually, it shows that I had answered you earlier when in fact you claimed I did not.*

My apologies, I should have been more clear about what I was looking for in response.

[December 15, 2008 10:31 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote: *Of course, one could say this about anything that is imaginary.*

David: "Is your position really that theistic arguments can prove the existence of 'anything that is imaginary'?"

Prove? No. My view is that the Christian god is imaginary and the arguments proposed to substantiate the claim that it exists are an attempt to provide some conceptual context in support of what is ultimately an arbitrary construct. The fact that theists have a really hard time explaining how one can reliably distinguish between what they call "God" and what they may merely be imagining is confirming evidence. Another point of evidence is all the varieties, even under the heading of Christianity, which "God" is able to assume. Some imagine an angry, vengeful god, some imagine a benevolent feel-good god, some imagine a god that plays a very minor role in the world, others imagine a god which is choreographing every minutia. There's the Calvinist god, the Arminian god, the Catholic god, the Pentecostal god, etc., etc., etc. They are distinct because what is imagined about them by their worshippers is distinct. There's a god to suit all tastes, because it is merely imaginary.

Now in regard to my statement above ("one could say this about anything that is imaginary"), are you disagreeing with this? Do you think something would prevent someone from saying the same kinds of things about something that is imaginary if he were so inclined?

David: "Or do you mean in general a series of arguments can converge on to show something imaginary allegedly exists?"

If someone wanted to assemble a series of arguments which are intended to show collectively that something imaginary is real, what would stop them? Theists do this all the time.

You see, David, according to my worldview, there is a fundamental distinction between what is real and what is only imaginary. The recognition that the imaginary is not real is a corollary of the primacy of existence. I have asked you repeatedly now to show how you can produce an argument for your god's existence while remaining consistent with the primacy of existence, which you have acknowledged is true in the case of human consciousness. As I have pointed out before, one can easily imagine a consciousness which enjoys an orientation between subject and object that is completely opposite to ours. But by pretending that the imaginary is real, he has already violated the primacy of existence and departed from reality.

I asked: *"Bully tactics"? Do you feel bullied?*

David: "Yes, and I'm not the first to call attention to your behavior."

There there, David. You needn't feel bullied. Just try to interact with the issues. It's ironic that you point to Paul Manata as an example of someone calling attention to bully behavior. That's like the pot calling the kettle black. By the way, if you scroll down to the bottom of Manata's post, you'll see that I had responded to his in a series of my own. Have you read these? Paul himself never responded to them.

But if you're feeling bullied, David, why do you keep coming back to me? You're the one who's been trying to take over the comments section of this blog. You come here voluntarily, no one is forcing you to come here. Don't complain if you're feeling bullied and keep coming back for more.

David: "'Profoundly debilitating malady' is quite a phrase to describe something your imagination has created, namely a mischaracterization of the theistic arguments."

I had figured I was dealing with an adult, and that you could take it when I point out the crippling deficiencies of theistic arguments. But when I do, you feel bullied. I've [noted before](#) that Christianity requires adults to use their minds in a childish manner.

David: "You appear to be convinced that you've 'shown' something by replacing the word 'God' with the word 'Blarko'."

I have yet to see any good reasons why arguments for "God" cannot be modified into arguments for Blarko.

David: "We can plug words into arguments all day long, but this doesn't do justice to serious inquiry into well-formed deductive premises and their conclusion - school yard tactics."

"Well-informed deductive premises" are not what I find in theistic arguments. See for instance [Bahnsen's Poof](#). In the opening statement of his debate with Gordon Stein, Greg Bahnsen does not even present an argument for the existence of his god. Perhaps I've violated a cardinal rule, that "if a proposition is ludicrous enough, we lend it undeserved credibility when we respond too politely" (Price, [Errors of the Elohist](#)). For that matter, why should anyone take the imaginary seriously, David?

I wrote: *Blarko has whatever attributes one wants to imagine it has. It could have the attributes of being able to create ex nihilo, to send worldwide floods, to be angry at the Amalekites, to incarnate itself, etc.*

David: "Now we're back where we started. In order for any given theistic argument to support Blarko's existence, he would need the attributes specific to that argument."

Let's see:

P1. Numbers are dependent upon or even constituted by intellectual activity such that if there were no minds, there would be no numbers.

P2. There are too many numbers for them to arise as a result of human activity.

C. Therefore, we should think of them as among Blarko's ideas.

What "attributes specific to [the above] argument" does Blarko lack? What attributes does the argument require Blarko (or "God") to have?

David: "So ok, we have 'created' an imaginary being named Blarko and given him all the attributes required for the arguments to work- ahem...the attributes of the theistic God."

Here you seem to be genericizing "God" for the sake of necessitating an equation between it and whatever rival is argued for in place of it. Take Geusha for instance, and contrast this with the Christian god. On the one hand, the Christian god is said to have created the first man, Adam, placed him in a garden (Eden), prohibited him from eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, allowed a serpent to beguile him, raised up a man named Noah, instructed him to build an ark, sent a worldwide flood, had a son named Jesus who was crucified, resurrected and ascended back to heaven, etc. On the other hand, Geusha did not create a man named Adam and put him in a place called the Garden of Eden, raise up a man named Noah and instruct him to build an ark, send a worldwide flood to destroy all the wicked, had a son named Jesus who was crucified, resurrected and ascended back to heaven, etc. Do "the theistic arguments" require these "attributes"? Not that I see.

But like the Christian god, Geusha is supernatural, it is conscious, it is the supreme being, it is omniscient,



omnipotent, sovereign. These generic qualities seem to fit the theistic arguments I've seen just fine.

David: "to get the arguments to work you still have to copy over the attributes from the theistic God."

Which attributes do you have in mind?

I wrote: *Actually, it shows that I had answered you earlier when in fact you claimed I did not.*

David: "My apologies, I should have been more clear about what I was looking for in response."

I have the suspicion that no matter what I say in response to your questions, you'll just call it "proof that all [I] have are assertions," not that this is an argument or anything.

So now that you are more familiar with my position - namely that your god is imaginary - what are you going to do about this? Are you going to try to convince me otherwise? Or are you going to try to malign my character (e.g., "you big bully!") so that you can feel better about your faith-based confessional investment? Or is it that you just want to argue, in spite of your losses? I've seen it all before, David. You would not be the first, nor will you be the last.

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 16, 2008 10:11 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

I will briefly quickly since you are apparently getting irritable.

*But if you're feeling bullied, David, why do you keep coming back to me? You're the one who's been trying to take over the comments section of this blog. You come here voluntarily, no one is forcing you to come here. Don't complain if you're feeling bullied and keep coming back for more.*

a) I didn't say I felt bullied, I said you were using bully tactics (a rhetorical ploy).

b) If you don't wish me to comment on your posts please advise. Also if you don't wish me to respond to your comments that address me specifically, please don't continue to ask questions. You will notice most of my responses are directed at your questions and vice-versa. Apparently I was incorrect in assuming mutual agreement to converse in this manner, and you feel I am trying to "take over." My apologies, I will remedy the situation.

\*\*\*I repeat, if you are ready to adjourn then refrain from asking me questions or ask me to stop posting comments.\*\*\*

c) I come here because I enjoy the discussion; no need to interpret my statement as a "complaint," it was merely an observation.

*Do you think something would prevent someone from saying the same kinds of things about something that is imaginary if he were so inclined?*

I'm not sure what you mean. A deductive argument (theistic arguments commonly are) is one that shows the conclusion to be true with 100% probability provided the premises are true. So you can either show the argument to be invalid or show that one of the premises is true. You've done neither, but instead insisted that the conclusion is false because it violates the primacy of existence. Regardless, if the theistic arguments fail, one MUST show that either they are invalid or a premise is false. You can't defeat a deductive argument just by saying "the conclusion is false." An inductive argument could attempt to make a better case for the contrary, but deductively its "either/or" and so one of the arguments must be shown invalid/unsound.

Replacing something in the argument's conclusion (such as "Blarko" for "Geushna") doesn't accomplish or demonstrate anything. Unless you show how the argument is invalid or unsound (false premise), then the proposition MUST be true - this is how deduction works. So assuming a theistic argument for "God" is perfectly sound and valid, then it follows that some thing- you can it Blarko, Darko, Schmarko, or God - is the unmoved



mover (cosmological), necessary being (ontological), designer (teleological), moral lawgiver (moral), etc....

*If someone wanted to assemble a series of arguments which are intended to show collectively that something imaginary is real, what would stop them? Theists do this all the time.*

What would stop them is someone falsifying a premise or demonstrating that the conclusion doesn't necessarily follow from the premises. What wouldn't stop them is someone saying, "Hey your conclusion is false because this axiom over here says it is."

*You see, David, according to my worldview, there is a fundamental distinction between what is real and what is only imaginary.*

I'm learning more about your worldview, it is quite a fascinating popular philosophy. Apparently what is "real" has an identity, and consciousness is the process of "identification." What confuses me is that consciousness exists too, but the priority of existence over consciousness must be held since the subject can't observe the subject-object relationship without an object. That makes perfect sense for human beings. But an infinite being? God exists and then He is conscious of Himself - not temporally but logically. So what is the problem there (theoretically)?

*I have asked you repeatedly now to show how you can produce an argument for your god's existence while remaining consistent with the primacy of existence, which you have acknowledged is true in the case of human consciousness.*

I gave you like about 20 arguments and you waved them off by simply asserting that they violated the primacy of existence. I have asked you repeatedly to show how exactly the arguments violate the primacy of existence. Again, it looks like a stalemate to me.

*By the way, if you scroll down to the bottom of Manata's post, you'll see that I had responded to his in a series of my own. Have you read these? Paul himself never responded to them.*

Yes, I'm slowly working his long diatribe. I'm more interested in Thorn's article right now.

*I have yet to see any good reasons why arguments for "God" cannot be modified into arguments for Blarko.*

Lets try one more time for the road:

a) Blarko is a word that references an imaginary being with specific attributes  
b) The attributes required for this being, for all the theistic arguments to be valid/sound are exactly the attributes that the theistic arguments are working with....so what? This is so silly. You can call the theistic God Blarko if you want to. Either he has the attributes that the arguments' terms work with, or he doesn't. If he does, then what distinguishes him from the theistic God? If nothing, the Leibniz's principle says He IS the theistic God (with respect to the aggregated terms of the theistic arguments). So in summary, if all the arguments point towards a thing with x,y,z, and d attributes and Blarko and YHWH both have them, then we either need to distinguish between Blarko and YHWH (via some other argument) or declare them to be the same thing.

P1. Numbers are dependent upon or even constituted by intellectual activity such that if there were no minds, there would be no numbers.

P2. There are too many numbers for them to arise as a result of human activity.

C. Therefore, we should think of them as among Blarko's ideas.

What "attributes specific to [the above] argument" does Blarko lack? What attributes does the argument require Blarko (or "God") to have?

a) That isn't a formal deductive argument, it is an outline.

b) Blarko at minimum needs to possess a mind and the ability to think of all those numbers. So yes "Blarko" works for that argument. But "Blarko" is just a word- a placeholder - for what the argument intends to ascribe to this being. So if you wish you distinguish between Blarko and some other being that also fits the bill, then you actually have to distinguish between them. So what distinguishes Blarko from YHWH needs to be established...notice I said established and not asserted.

*Take Geusha for instance, and contrast this with the Christian god. On the one hand, the Christian god is said to have created the first man, Adam, placed him in a garden (Eden), prohibited him from eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, allowed a serpent to beguile him, raised up a man named Noah, instructed him to build an ark, sent a worldwide flood, had a son named Jesus who was crucified, resurrected and ascended back to heaven, etc. On the other hand, Geusha did not create a man named Adam and put him in a place called the Garden of Eden, raise up a man named Noah and instruct him to build an ark, send a worldwide flood to destroy all the wicked, had a son named Jesus who was crucified, resurrected and ascended back to heaven, etc. Do "the theistic arguments" require these "attributes"? Not that I see.*

This is irrelevant to the arguments for the theistic God. Of course I agree that Geushna is not the Christian God for precisely the reasons you stated.

*But like the Christian god, Geusha is supernatural, it is conscious, it is the supreme being, it is omniscient, omnipotent, sovereign. These generic qualities seem to fit the theistic arguments I've seen just fine.*

Is Geusha a moral lawgiver?

*So now that you are more familiar with my position - namely that your god is imaginary - what are you going to do about this?*

Nothing. Objectivism sets itself up to be atheistic - there is nothing I need do about it.

*Or are you going to try to malign my character (e.g., "you big bully!") so that you can feel better about your faith-based confessional investment?*

I never said any such thing nor intended such result. Slandering a man to make yourself feel better is something only a selfish person would do - and we all know which worldview of ours esteems selfishness and which doesn't.

*Or is it that you just want to argue, in spite of your losses? I've seen it all before, David. You would not be the first, nor will you be the last.*

Ahh the usual ending where Dawson declares himself the winner...Or is it that you think you can talk your way out of a discussion until your opponent tires of pointing out every time you jump to a conclusion without argument? But I do appreciate you returning the flattery.

Cheers,  
David

P.S. I'm relocating to Denver in a month so email access may be intermittent.

[December 16, 2008 6:12 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

*I wrote: But if you're feeling bullied, David, why do you keep coming back to me? You're the one who's been trying to take over the comments section of this blog. You come here voluntarily, no one is forcing you to come here. Don't complain if you're feeling bullied and keep coming back for more.*

David: "a) I didn't say I felt bullied, I said you were using bully tactics (a rhetorical ploy)."

When I asked if you felt bullied, you replied with a yes.

David: "b) If you don't wish me to comment on your posts please advise. Also if you don't wish me to respond to your comments that address me specifically, please don't continue to ask questions. You will notice most of my responses are directed at your questions and vice-versa. Apparently I was incorrect in assuming mutual agreement to converse in this manner, and you feel I am trying to 'take over'. My apologies, I will remedy the situation."

After all the time I've spent in discussions with you, answering your questions, trying to reason with you, and then you say things like:

- “You have dodged enough questions to convince me your are bluffing”
- “all you have are assertions”
- “Wow, more bully tactics”

I am under the impression that further dialogue with you is probably worthless, especially given the fact that you avoid so many of my questions.

David: “(c) I come here because I enjoy the discussion; no need to interpret my statement as a ‘complaint’, it was merely an observation.”

I have never asked or told visitor to my blog not to post here, and I will not start with you. Think of yourself as a guest in my home, and don’t overstay your welcome.

I asked: *Do you think something would prevent someone from saying the same kinds of things about something that is imaginary if he were so inclined?*

David: “I’m not sure what you mean. A deductive argument (theistic arguments commonly are) is one that shows the conclusion to be true with 100% probability provided the premises are true. So you can either show the argument to be invalid or show that one of the premises is true. You’ve done neither, but instead insisted that the conclusion is false because it violates the primacy of existence.”

Assumption of the primacy of consciousness is sufficient grounds to reject an argument or idea. Theistic arguments assume the primacy of existence in the very notion of what they’re intended to prove.

David: “Regardless, if the theistic arguments fail, one MUST show that either they are invalid or a premise is false.”

Any premise assuming the primacy of consciousness is false by virtue of this error. Since the notion of a god assumes the primacy of consciousness, any assertion (premise) or conclusion assuming its reality is thereby false and must be rejected.

David: “Replacing something in the argument’s conclusion (such as ‘Blarko’ for ‘Geushna’) doesn’t accomplish or demonstrate anything.”

It does show something. For instance, it shows that a theist would probably not accept the argument when it is cast in the interest of proving the existence of Blarko or Geusha, but he will still accept it when it is used to argue for his preferred supernatural being.

David: “Unless you show how the argument is invalid or unsound (false premise), then the proposition MUST be true - this is how deduction works.”

And as I have pointed out (a long time ago in fact), since theistic arguments assume the primacy of consciousness in their premises, their conclusions cannot be true.

I wrote: *You see, David, according to my worldview, there is a fundamental distinction between what is real and what is only imaginary.*

David: “I’m learning more about your worldview, it is quite a fascinating popular philosophy.”

It’s good that you are learning about my worldview. But it’s far from popular. You yourself had earlier stated, “most atheists (for instance over at Debunking Christianity) consider Objectivism to be more fundamentalist and cultic than Christianity.” I can certainly say that Objectivism has never enjoyed the popularity of Christianity.

David: “Apparently what is ‘real’ has an identity, and consciousness is the process of ‘identification’. What confuses me is that consciousness exists too, but the priority of existence over consciousness must be held since the subject can’t observe the subject-object relationship without an object. That makes perfect sense for human beings. But an infinite being? God exists and then He is conscious of Himself - not temporally but logically. So what is the problem there (theoretically)?”

The notion of a god reverses the orientation between subject and object. You seem to recognize this since you apparently don't think the orientation between subject and object which human beings have in their experience applies to a so-called "infinite consciousness." I had asked you earlier how you formed your concept of consciousness such that it allows for such diametrically opposite orientation, but you never explained this. I also pointed out that one's epistemology needs to be consistent with the nature of his own consciousness, and since the primacy of existence does apply in the case of human consciousness (and you have agreed with this more than once now), one's epistemology needs to be consistent with the primacy of existence. For instance, it would be invalid to say something like "God exists because I want it to," just as it would be invalid to say "God doesn't exist because I don't want it to." Wishing doesn't make it so, and that's because existence holds metaphysical primacy. I asked how you can come to the conclusion that a god exists while remaining consistent to the primacy of existence in your epistemology. I have not seen how you can do this. The notion that the universe was created by a conscious being can only mean that the universe is subjective, and that knowledge is ultimately subjective, since in the end it is someone's wishing which calls all the shots. Suddenly wishing does make it so, once we've departed from the reality of human nature and into something which cannot be distinguished from imagination. For further explanation, please review the following:

[The Axioms and the Primacy of Existence](#)

[Theism and Subjective Metaphysics](#)

[Bahnsen on "Knowing the Supernatural"](#)

[The Cartoon Universe of Theism](#)

[Rival Philosophies of Fact](#)

[Only Two Worldviews?](#)

[Confessions of a Vantillian Subjectivist](#)

[God's and Square Circles](#)

In [Theism and Subjective Metaphysics](#), you'll see that Paul Manata concedes that according to theism, reality is subjective, since it's "based on the divine mind." He then interjected that "it's still objective for us humans." I pointed out that not only does this mean that the theist have no consistent metaphysic, it also reduces to subjectivism since ultimately nothing in reality is objective.

I wrote: *I have asked you repeatedly now to show how you can produce an argument for your god's existence while remaining consistent with the primacy of existence, which you have acknowledged is true in the case of human consciousness.*

David: "I gave you like about 20 arguments and you waved them off by simply asserting that they violated the primacy of existence."

None of the arguments in the Plantinga piece deal with the issue of metaphysical primacy. Thus they fail to address my question.

David: "I have asked you repeatedly to show how exactly the arguments violate the primacy of existence."

By positing a consciousness which allegedly holds metaphysical primacy over its objects.

I wrote: *I have yet to see any good reasons why arguments for "God" cannot be modified into arguments for Blarko.*

David: "a) Blarko is a word that references an imaginary being with specific attributes"

This of course would not prevent arguments for "God" from being modified into arguments for Blarko. After all, theistic arguments are arguments for an imaginary being.

David: "Either he has the attributes that the arguments' terms work with, or he doesn't. If he does, then what distinguishes him from the theistic God?"

It depends on what is meant by “the theistic God.” For instance, if “the theistic God” had a son, then obviously it’s not the same supernatural being as Blarko, because Blarko did not have a son. Neither did Geusha. Also, Geusha did not inspire any of the 66 books of the Judeo-Christian bible. And neither did Blarko. Also, Blarko may be a she. The distinctions could be endless.

I wrote: *P1. Numbers are dependent upon or even constituted by intellectual activity such that if there were no minds, there would be no numbers.*

*P2. There are too many numbers for them to arise as a result of human activity.*

*C. Therefore, we should think of them as among Blarko’s ideas.*

*What “attributes specific to [the above] argument” does Blarko lack? What attributes does the argument require Blarko (or “God”) to have?*

David: “a) That isn’t a formal deductive argument, it is an outline.”

Indeed. It introduces a term in the conclusion which is not present in any of the premises. That’s a glaring deficiency, but this is what I culled from Plantinga’s version. But this deficiency is not insurmountable. One could revise it so that it is formally valid.

David: “b) Blarko at minimum needs to possess a mind and the ability to think of all those numbers. So yes ‘Blarko’ works for that argument.”

Exactly. The same argument can be used to establish the existence of a rival imaginary being. That was my point.

David: “So if you wish you distinguish between Blarko and some other being that also fits the bill, then you actually have to distinguish between them.”

See above.

David: “I agree that Geushna is not the Christian God for precisely the reasons you stated.”

And I’m confident that arguments used to conclude that the Christian god exists, can be easily modified to conclude that Geusha exists.

I wrote: *But like the Christian god, Geusha is supernatural, it is conscious, it is the supreme being, it is omniscient, omnipotent, sovereign. These generic qualities seem to fit the theistic arguments I’ve seen just fine.*

David: “Is Geusha a moral lawgiver?”

The Lahu believe so.

I asked: *So now that you are more familiar with my position - namely that your god is imaginary - what are you going to do about this?*

David: “Nothing. Objectivism sets itself up to be atheistic - there is nothing I need do about it.”

It’s important to note that Objectivism’s atheism is not a starting point, but a logical consequence of the consistent application of the primacy of existence to knowledge of reality.

I asked: *Or are you going to try to malign my character (e.g., “you big bully!”) so that you can feel better about your faith-based confessional investment?*

David: “I never said any such thing nor intended such result. Slandering a man to make yourself feel better is something only a selfish person would do - and we all know which worldview of ours esteems selfishness and which doesn’t.”

Actually, I completely disagree with your assessment. Slandering a man to make oneself feel better is something that a *selfless* person would do. A genuinely selfish person would have too much pride to do this (see for instance [here](#) and [here](#)). And we both know which of our worldviews disdains selfishness. Maybe you’re more

selfish than you realize.

Regards,  
Dawson

P.S. Good luck with the move! I know it can be a trying experience. I hope all goes well.

[December 16, 2008 9:07 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Quick clarification to close things up:

*When I asked if you felt bullied, you replied with a yes.*

You originally asked “*Bully tactics*”? *Do you feel bullied?*

I responded:

“Yes, and I'm not the first to call attention to your behavior.”

As you can see I answered yes to your first question.

*I am under the impression that further dialogue with you is probably worthless, especially given the fact that you avoid so many of my questions.*

We have both deferred answering questions for brevity's sake, but I do not see where I have avoided any germane question. Please feel free to pose it again.

Perhaps sometime in the future we can revisit two questions I had:

- a) In atheism is true, why should I worry if my perceptions are consistent with reality? Why should I care about truth in an atheist world?
- b) If you don't subscribe to the big bang model, then what?

At any rate, I just ordered *Philosophy: Who Needs It?* so maybe I'll be better educated on Objectivism next time we cross swords. Cheers!

[December 17, 2008 3:23 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: “As you can see I answered yes to your first question.”

I see. I thought you were answering yes to both questions. That's good. I guess that means you don't feel bullied.

David: “We have both deferred answering questions for brevity's sake, but I do not see where I have avoided any germane question. Please feel free to pose it again.”

I drew attention to two of them in my last rejoinder, namely how one can come to the conclusion that a god exists while remaining consistent with the primacy of existence, and how the concept of consciousness was formed such that it could allow for the assertion of a consciousness which enjoys precisely the opposite orientation between subject and object that biological organisms have. The other question had to do with how one can reliably distinguish between what the believer calls “God” and what he may merely be imagining. At one point you referred to Plantinga's compendium of theistic arguments, but none of them address the issue of metaphysical primacy.

David: “a) In atheism is true, why should I worry if my perceptions are consistent with reality? Why should I care about truth in an atheist world?”

The obvious answer is that life depends on this. If you think you perceive a turn in the road but in fact what

you're perceiving is a thousand-foot cliff, this can have fatal consequences. However, since perceptions have a causal basis (they are objective), the issue is not whether perceptions are consistent with reality (in fact, they are part of reality), but whether or not we accurately identify what we perceive. But even here, the same concern is at stake: life depends on it. Of course, I'm answering this from an Objectivist standpoint, and in Objectivism, one's life is his standard of value.

Meanwhile, if there were a supernatural being which oversees all of reality, I don't see how it could ultimately matter, regardless of what may be there. We'd be like characters in a cartoon, seeing whatever the supernatural being wants us to see. We could fall off a cliff and, like Wile E. Coyote, walk away just fine from it. Or, we could turn with the road and get struck dead by an angel of death sent to exact revenge.

David: "b) If you don't subscribe to the big bang model, then what?"

Then too bad for the big bang model. ;)

David: "At any rate, I just ordered *Philosophy: Who Needs It?* so maybe I'll be better educated on Objectivism next time we cross swords."

Good book! Just note that there's no question mark in the title.

Regards,  
Dawson

[December 17, 2008 4:32 PM](#)

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