Faith as Hope in the Imaginary

I have already demonstrated how Christian faith involves belief without understanding. There is another component to Christian faith which is often ignored, especially by those who seek to defend Christian dogma. The New Testament itself tells us that Christian faith is aligned with hoping. Hebrews 11:1 makes this clear when it says that "faith is the substance of things *hoped for*." Hope by itself is akin to wishing, only stronger, while the hope that informs faith is like the down payment on a major psychological investment. It is putting your heart into what you wish for, making a commitment to that wish as if it were real, bankable and imminent. The more unbelievable the better.

And what does the faithful believer *hope for*? According to the bible's own teachings, he does not hope for things that he has perceived and knows are real. Romans 8:24 confirms this:

> "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?"

When a person hopes, he hopes for something he "sees" in his "mind's eye," that is, he hopes for something which he imagines. In the case of the Christian believer, he sets his hope on an afterlife, an eternity in a magic kingdom. Are these things real? Has he seen these things? According to Romans 8:24, he wouldn't hope for them if he had already seen them. No, he imagines these things, and he has no alternative to imagining them. To have faith that these things are real is not simply to believe that they are real. Contrary to popular parlance, faith is not mere belief. One has faith when he puts his hopes in the things he imagines and purposes to act on those hopes. This way one can doubt, as most believers frequently do, but he can still have faith. Even if he does not always believe that his god is there looking out for him and guiding his steps through life, the believer can still act on the hope that the deity he imagines is really there, right beside him, the ultimate imaginary friend.

A hope that is continually indulged can easily become an obsession, and Christianity pressures the believer to invest himself in its faith program as an all-consuming obsession. Rick Warren, bestselling Christian author and mega-church pastor, explicitly incorporates obsession-generating practices into his teaching:

> The Bible tells us to "pray all the time." How is it possible to do this? One way is to use "breath prayers" throughout the day ... You choose a brief sentence or a simple phrase that can be repeated to Jesus in one breath: "You are with me ... You are my God." Pray it as often as possible so it is rooted deep in your heart. (*The Purpose-Driven Life*, p. 89)

Prayer is the means by which the believer can commune, albeit one-sidedly, with an imaginary being. Talking to the imaginary makes it seem more real. If practiced consistently, the believer begins to feel like someone is actually listening. And he will take anything – even the barking of a dog – as a sign from the supernatural back to him.

Now apologists of course become noticeably squeamish when the topic of prayer comes up in debate. There are all kinds of reasons, we learn from them, why we should not expect prayer to make any actual difference in the world. But we already know this. For amusement, ask an apologist whether or not prayer can alter "God's plan." It's a yes or no question that will typically not be answered in a yes or no fashion. Rather, what you'll often get is cheap, uninformative ridicule from an incensed defender of hopes in the imaginary who suddenly finds himself incapable of affirming absolutes. Then we are told that prayer is about building a relationship between the believer and the ruling consciousness. In fact, it is a means of taking the propagandistic tactics from the church hall out into the street in the form of a reiterative verbal self-inducement device. The effect is to replace values-oriented motivation, which is worldly and selfish, with the motivation to stay on good terms with an imaginary being, regardless of the cost to one's values.

> John 12:25: "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

> Luke 14:26: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

Clearly, for the believer, the imaginary is more prized than the actual, even when it comes to the human beings that are closest to him.

The purpose of getting into the habit of constantly praying to an imaginary being is to lose sight of the fact that what the believer is praying to is in fact merely imaginary, and also to marinade his mind in the depths of the devotional program with the hope that eventually he'll be convinced its teachings are true. Conviction is never perfected, which is the reason why constant repetition and reinforcement are needed. A significant philosophical outcome to this is that the believer loses the ability to distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary. If it is written in the holy storybook, then it's true no matter what reason, science and technical experts have to say on the topic. And defending the holy storybook from criticism is a means by which the believer can become even further invested in its confessional demands. By this point, the believer has lost touch with genuine knowledge, and is suffocating in fantasy.

Now of course the believer still perceives and interacts with real objects in the real world, but the devotional program requires him to imagine supernatural powers "back of" those objects. The believer is not encouraged only to pray, but to "watch and pray" (cf. Mk. 13:33, Mt. 26:41, Lk. 21:36). The word "watch" here is code for imagining invisible magic beings "back of" everything in the universe. As Van Til put it, "I could believe in nothing else if I did not, as back of everything, believe in this God." ("Toward A Reformed Apologetic," 1972) Anyone can imagine anything "back of" the objects he perceives, and if he lacks the philosophical principles by which he can distinguish between what is real and what is merely imaginary, he's a prime candidate for Christian indoctrination, a fish waiting to be hooked, gutted, filleted and canned by the ministry of fishers. It is because anyone can imagine invisible magic beings "back of" the things he sees, touches and hears, that anyone can become a Christian. Just imagine that Jesus is real, and you're on your way to faith. As John Frame acknowledged, "a person with a wish to be fulfilled is often on the road to belief." (*Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 37) The gospel formula of promising the unearned to men, lures those who seek the unearned into its tangle of traps. And those who are trapped by Christianity's confessional devices, end up steeping in resentment of those who still roam free.

The believer does not imagine only good invisible magic beings "back of" everything he sees and touches. Not in the least. Indeed, there are demons, devils and other evil magic beings "back of" the things the believer experiences too. These malevolent forces are blamed for the stubbornness of those awful non-believers, spoilsports as they are for them who prefer the imaginary over the actual. Every non-Christian, the believer is encouraged to imagine, is infested with these evil invisible magic beings who have beguiled them with worldly wonders and despicable delights. They are obsessed with non-believers, because the very existence of non-believers poses an incriminating challenge against their devotional program. For if its teachings were really true, how do you explain non-belief? The devotional program makes its attempts to explain this annoying fact, but they're far from convincing, so by themselves they would not be enough. Non-believers are thus treated collectively, generally characterized as afflicted souls seeking deliberately to do evil, deliberately rejecting " truth," as people without hope. Again, it's all about hope, hope in the imaginary.

This is where the fear kicks in. The Christian devotional program requires the believer to take fear seriously. But he doesn't fear the possibility of mundane accidents or common criminals. Rather, he fears things that are imaginary. He fears what he is told can happen after people die. And more than this, he wants other people to be consumed with this kind of fear, just as he is. So just as he puts his hopes in the imaginary, the believer also puts his hopes in fear. He hopes that by instilling fear in non-believers, they'll either be converted or silenced, for he cannot stand their presence, and this is because he cannot stand being reminded that he's been had. But to instill this fear in a non-believer, the believer's going to have to get the non-believer to start imagining things, just as the believer did when he started out in the faith. Imaginative scenarios are often conjured to concretize the peril of the non-believer's imagined spiritual situation. Consider the following:

> Suppose you were exploring an unknown glacier in the north of Greenland in the dead of winter. Just as you reach a sheer cliff with a spectacular view of miles and miles of jagged ice and mountains of snow, a terrible storm breaks in. The wind is so strong that the fear rises in your heart that it might blow you over the cliff. But in the midst of the storm you discover a cleft in the ice where you can hide.... (Why Faith Alone)

Now, I have never been to Greenland, and I have never attempted to explore a glacier, either known or unknown, even in good weather. Such things really do not interest me; I have better ways of spending my time. But I can certainly *imagine* myself in such a situation. By imagining such a situation, I can project myself into the perilous danger described here, an emergency in which the whole universe seems to have turned malevolently against me, with no course of action available for rescuing myself. The analogy is of course acknowledged by the

Christian to be marginal, for in such a situation the danger is "merely physical," and the peril which the Christian has in mind is supposed to be "spiritual" - i.e., supernatural, with "eternal implications," affecting one's "soul," etc.

So even if I imagine myself at the edge of an arctic glacier during a violent ice storm with neither shoe nor shelter, that's not really enough imagining. I'm supposed to imagine something even worse than this. The believer wants me to wade deeper into my imagination, for only there will be found the kind of fear that he wants to take seriously. But how do you concretize something as woeful and dreadful as what the Christian wants you to take seriously? A materialist would not likely be impressed with the glacier scenario. He could easily say to it, "it would be the ride of a lifetime! The chest-pounding exhilaration of my last moments of life would be worth it all! And it would end as suddenly as it began. After all, when I'm dead, I'm worm bait anyway." So such imaginative scenarios are in fact rather self-defeating for the apologist, for unless one blurs the distinction between the real and the imaginary, they tend to accomplish precisely the opposite end that is desired.

But the point that non-believers do not accept the believer's religious premises seems to be lost on the believer. Instead, the believer, who dutifully recites the dogma that he has no righteousness of his own, casts himself in the dire scenario he describes, and there he imagines himself standing before a self-sufficient and holy deity, thinking "What command would I rather hear than this: 'Hope in my love!'?" Of course, it is easy to imagine that an imaginary being has demands and is capable of love, that it loves and provides and protects. Imaginary beings are capable of whatever the imaginer imagines it to be capable of. And if the only condition for salvation from the utter deficiency and depravity that believers imagine for man, is that the believer pretend that an invisible magic being will be there to save him and that its terms are that he put his hope in it, he will naturally want to call this "good news." For it really requires nothing from him other than that he desire the unearned and go along with the devotional program's pretenses. It has no initial material cost, but it demands that he sacrifice his conscience and live a lie. It's all downhill from there.

But it is not only good news for those who imagine themselves filthy, impotent wretches. It is also the glory of the imaginary deity to make only this demand upon the believer. Why? Because when he hopes in the imaginary he shows that the imaginary is strong and he, the believer, is weak; that the imaginary is rich and he is poor; that the imaginary is full and he is empty. For in fact, a man who substitutes the imaginary for the actual is in fact empty. When the believer hopes in an imaginary deity, he shows that he is the one who has needs, not the imaginary deity itself (Psalm 50:10-15; 71:4-6, 14).... Of course, the imaginary has no needs anyway, so the believer is on safe ground here.

The beauty of the gospel is that in one simple act of imagination (hoping that an imaginary deity exists and has cosmically taken custody of one's soul), an individual can pretend that the religious message he hears is "good news" and that his deity gets the glory. That is why the believer can imagine that the deity takes pleasure in those who hope in his love – because in this simple act of imagining, he can imagine that his deity's grace is glorified and that he as a filthy wretch has been rescued. This is the command of the gospel that keeps the object of imagination at the center – the center of its own affections and of the believer's.

So why faith alone? Because in the mind of the believer, faith validates fantasy through his hope in what he imagines. The Christian devotional program provides, in the form of biblical verses intended to reassure the believer that the imaginary is real and comfort him in times of doubt and distress, the formulae for reinforcing the delusion that Jesus is real and in the believer's life. For this to be successful, it is crucial that the believer imagine that his god is present with him at all times, observing what the believer observes, and empathizing with his situation on a day to day basis.

> "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." - James 4:8

If you imagine that Jesus is close to you, then, like any imaginary friend, Jesus will be close to you. As with anything imaginary, however, the imaginer has to make the first move. He needs to do the imagining first, and then the fantasy will reciprocate. This is why Christianity requires the believer to become as a little child. Children love to imagine. Only for the Christian, imagining is more than just playtime. He imagines, but also hopes that what he imagines is real. He hopes this so much that after a while, it almost does seem real to him. The result is a *waking fantasy*. For a notable example of this, see Carr vs. Cole.

> "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." – II Cor. 5:17

The believer imagines that by simply adhering to the prescribed Christian devotional program, he has been

metaphysically transformed from his old self to a new being, not simply refurbished, but wholly renewed. Of course, he's still the same person in reality, but he imagines he's different. He's still a biological organism, still needs to eat and sleep, still needs to put forth effort to achieve corporeal values without which he would die. So no change is visible, but that's because the change is imaginary. The imaginary and the invisible of course look very much alike.

> "...lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." - Mt. 28:20

The believer is to imagine that Jesus is always with him, and so long as the believer imagines that Jesus is with him, it seems to the believer that Jesus is really there, just like an imaginary friend. Interestingly, when believers in other deities imagine their deities, they do essentially the very same thing that Christian believers do: they imagine. A Muslim, for instance, imagines Allah. A Zoroastrian imagines Ahura Mazda. A Hindu imagines Brahma. A Lahu tribesman imagines Geusha. Etc. There is an unlimited constellation of invisible magic beings that can be accessed through the imagination. And just as the Muslim, the Zoroastrian, the Hindu and the Lahu tribesman have no alternative to imagining as a means of "knowing" their deities, the Christian believer has no alternative to imagining as the means of "knowing" his deity. And when he urges non-believers to "come to Christ," the Christian is in fact demanding that non-believers imagine Jesus and pretend along with him that Jesus is actually a real being existing in a supernatural realm, but also right there next to them too. The imaginary can be wherever the imaginer wants it to be. The reason why Christians become so upset with non-believers when they refrain from indulging in the imaginary, is because anyone can imagine anything he wants and believers are disturbed when people don't go along with the pretense. The believer wants his religious beliefs to be true, so he can't understand why others wouldn't want this as well and why anyone would resist confusing the imaginary with the real. And because he wants his religious beliefs to be true, he resents those who don't go along with the pretense that they are true. By its very nature, non-belief pours heaping coals on the mind of the bible-believer. This is why internet apologists have acquired the reputation for condescending attitudes, vitriolic defensiveness, contentiousness and pettiness.

> "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." – Mt. 28:26-29

In the communion ritual, when the believer drinks wine, he's supposed to imagine that it's really Jesus' blood that he's drinking. And when he eats a wafer, he's supposed to imagine that it's actually Jesus' flesh that he's eating. In reality, he's really only drinking wine and really only eating a wafer. But in the Christian worldview, reality bends to serve the imagination.

> "Don't you know that you are slaves of anyone you obey? You can be slaves of sin and die, or you can be obedient slaves of God and be acceptable to him." – Rom. 6:16

Christians view all human beings as slaves, either as slaves to a good imaginary being, or to an evil imaginary being. Some strains of Christianity are more or less consistent with its overt deterministic implications and even characterize human beings as puppets in service to one or another imaginary being. It is good to let Christians speak for themselves on such matters, for in fact they are slaves to the imaginary. A Christian ministry, then, is an organization devoted to enslaving its members to imagination.

> "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." – Mt. 10:28

The believer loves to imagine that an invisible magic being is waiting to judge and condemn people, especially spoilsport atheists, after they die. The believer obsesses over death just as he obsesses over fear and guilt. Death is so important that it occupies a central concern in his worldview. It serves as the standard to which he measures everything in life. This seems benign to him, even sensible, because he imagines death to be another realm, a realm of vindication for himself as a devotee of the imaginary, and vengeance on those who have the audacity to recognize that reality does not conform to anyone's imagination.

Is this an unlikely analysis? Unfortunately not at all. Frightening situations, like the Greenland scenario we saw above and many teachings from the bible, can provide the mind with a working model for squelching one's knowledge of reality to comport with what is imagined. We see this in Cornelius Van Til's autobiographical account of his own childhood experience of investing himself in the theistic confession. Van Til tells us:

I can recall playing as a child in a sandbox built into a corner of the hay-barn. From the hay-barn I would go through the cow-barn to the house. Built into the hay- barn too, but with doors opening into the cow-barn, was a bed for the working-man. How badly I wanted permission to sleep in that bed for a night! Permission was finally given. Freud was still utterly unknown to me, but I had heard about ghosts and "forerunners of death." That night I heard the cows jingle their chains. I knew there were cows and that they did a lot of jingling with their chains, but after a while I was not quite certain that it was only the cows that made all the noises I heard. Wasn't there someone walking down the aisle back of the cows, and wasn't he approaching my bed? Already I had been taught to say my evening prayers. Some of the words of that prayer were to this effect: "Lord, convert me, that I may be converted." Unmindful of the paradox, I prayed that prayer that night as I had never prayed before. (Why I Believe in God)

There really was no one "walking down the aisle back of the cows," and there really was no one "approaching [young Van Til's] bed." This was all something he imagined, and as he imagined, the distinction between what really was the case and what he imagined to be the case became increasingly blurred. This is evident from his own admission: "after a while I was not quite certain that it was only the cows that made all the noises I heard." And as he lost sight of reality, he naturally became frightened, and it was here, in his highly charged emotional state, that he made his lifelong decision to surrender his mind to the imaginary. It is on this basis that he turned to his parents' religious preachings, in prayer delving even deeper into the imaginary – an imaginary fix for an imaginary problem. Later in life Van Til was proud to tell us that "I had not in the least given up the faith of my childhood." (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 191) Which means: Van Til never learned how to distinguish the real from the imaginary, even as an adult. This is what Christianity does to the minds of human beings if allowed.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: Faith, imagination

posted by Bahnsen Burner at 6:00 AM

4 Comments:

Vytautas said...

The imaginer loses the ability to distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary. The imaginer lives in an imaginary world created from his own imagination, so that the imaginary world is real only to the imaginer. The imaginer determines what he imagines, but the imaginer cannot make the imaginary real to another person.

There is a difference though between imagining something and believing something. Imagination creates something that is false, but belief affirms something to be true. So when an imaginer imagines something, then he cannot believe that his imagination is true because what he imagines is false. It is impossible to believe something that is false. So the imaginer cannot believe his imagination.

June 10, 2008 4:58 PM

Bahnsen Burner said...

Hello Vytautas,

Thank you for your comments.

You wrote: "The imaginer loses the ability to distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary."

He can, but there is a way to avoid this. By adopting a worldview which recognizes and remains consistent with the primacy of existence, a thinker can use his imagination without the danger of mistaking it for reality or losing the ability to distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary. Christianity is not such a worldview. It nowhere recognizes the primacy of existence, and its teachings assume the opposite principle, the primacy of consciousness. That is why faith is non-negotiable in Christianity.

You wrote: "The imaginer lives in an imaginary world created from his own imagination, so that the imaginary world is real only to the imaginer."

This is not the case for everyone who imagines. I can imagine winning the lottery, for instance. But by doing so I do not sacrifice the actual world in favor of an imaginary world. Since I recognize the primacy of existence, I also recognize the fact that my image of winning the lottery is simply a fantasy. I imagine that it would be nice, but I *know* that it is not *real*. I can say all this because I adhere to the principle of the primacy of existence.

If, however, one's worldview defaults on the issue of metaphysical primacy, then he is left without a compass when it comes to distinguishing between the real and the imaginary. Sometimes he'll get it right, since for any adult thinker the primacy of existence is inescapable and implicit in one's thinking, but he risks getting it wrong. It is this risk which mystical worldviews like Christianity seek to exploit in an individual. It not only seeks to get people when they're young and philosophically defenseless, it also seeks to get them when they're at a low point in their life and thus psychologically vulnerable to the seven mind-game devices of the Christian devotional program.

You wrote: "The imaginer determines what he imagines, but the imaginer cannot make the imaginary real to another person."

It is true that imagination is volitional. One *chooses* when to imagine, what to imagine, and when to stop imagining.

You wrote: "There is a difference though between imagining something and believing something."

Yes, imagining and believing are different operations of the mind. I can imagine that I have won the lottery without believing that I have.

You wrote: "Imagination creates something that is false, but belief affirms something to be true."

Imagination does not actually create anything. Imagination is a mental operation that begins as the rearrangement of what we have observed. The imaginary is unreal. Belief, on the other hand, is the degree of confidence we have in a proposition that falls well short of certainty. If someone asks me on a cloudy morning if it is going to rain, I may answer "I believe so." My use of the concept "belief" here signals that I'm not sure, but that I'll plan my day to be ready for rain in case it comes.

You wrote: "So when an imaginer imagines something, then he cannot believe that his imagination is true because what he imagines is false."

Most likely he won't believe it the first time he imagines it. He would be too aware of the fact that he was imagining at this point. But if he continues to imagine it, repeating over and over and over the exercise of imagining the same thing, and invests his hopes in what he imagines, reality and fantasy will over time come to blur into one another in his mind. This is why Christians like Rick Warren encourage believers to pray constantly. Christians on the whole do not really believe their religion's teachings; rather, they hope that they are true and, importantly, they're afraid to admit that they don't believe them, and they usually become very afraid of the consequences of not believing (which are imaginary as well). This is why the bible says "the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). It begins with an imaginary fear – like Van Til's – and that fear never leaves. If the Christian devotional program is indulged, it will culminate in the final device, holy terror.

You wrote: "It is impossible to believe something that is false."

So if I believe that Christianity is irrational, baseless and deceitful, then this cannot be false, because it is something I believe?

You wrote: "So the imaginer cannot believe his imagination. "

If he is honest, he will recognize that what he imagines is unreal. But some people do not make the choice to be honest, and it is quite possible that the worldview they have adopted fails them on the issue of metaphysical primacy. If so, they're headed for mysticism if they're not already there.

Regards,
Dawson

Robert_B said...

Greetings Dawson: You wrote another great blog. Have you considered doing a podcast? It would be great drive time listening.

I thought about your challenge to distinguish any difference between belief and imagining god and wrote a short bit.

What is the nature of god-belief. Is it distinguishable from imagination? Can the god believer describe a method whereby another person may reliably distinguish any difference between what they believe god to be and what they imagine as god? Indeed, what is the difference between belief and imagination? Dictionary.com lists several definitions including the following: belief - "any cognitive content held as true -a vague idea in which some confidence is placed-confidence in the truth or existence of something not immediately susceptible to rigorous proof ", and they define imagining as "to form a mental image of something not actually present to the senses". From these, it is readily apparent that imagination plays the dominant role in god belief.

Invisible magic beings existing in other realms and communicating with people is surely just as vague an idea as it is an idea not susceptible to rigorous proof. God is defined, as an infinite personal being that is transcendent and omnipresent, supernatural, and immaterial. To be a personal being is to be finite, yet God is defined as infinite. To be transcendent is to be non-spatial, lacking dimensions or location and non-temporal, lacking duration. But to be omnipresent is to be everywhere. Supernatural means the negation of all that is natural and thus to not be part of nature and to lack any ability to interact with nature. Special Relativity informs humanity that $E=MC^2$ and thus matter and energy are equated in proportion to C^2. Immaterial means to be other than material, other than matter or energy. By virtue of self-contradiction, God is certainly vague. God then is defined as a vague contradiction that has no location but is everywhere, no dimensions but is everything, no duration but has existed all through time, no ability to interact with nature but can do anything, no mass, and no energy but is something else. By virtue of self-contradiction, God is incoherent. This is the ontological equivalent of nothingness.

Placing confidence in and assigning truth status to the ontological equivalent of nothingness as a personal being of infinite scope is the ultimate act of accepting something not immediately susceptible to rigorous proof. Entirely such an action must take place by forming a mental image of something not actually present to the senses since there is nothing in nature that indicates that such beings as gods might exist or from which a concept of "god" may be formed. From these considerations, it is readily apparent that god belief stems from the subjective imagination.

Could you briefly critique this by pointing out where my analysis diverges from Objectivist principles?

Thanks and All the Best to you and your family.

Robert Bumbalough

June 13, 2008 11:26 AM

Bahnsen Burner said...

Hi Robert,

Thanks for your note. I've found your deconversion story on Debunking Christianity, but have only read through a portion of it. (I have precious time these days and tend to be a very slow reader, but I do hope to read the rest of your story soon!) So far, however, I've enjoyed what I've read. Some time back John Loftus invited me to join DC, and part of that invite request was to post an initial blog on my deconversion experience. I never really intended to join DC (though I was flattered by the invite, I really do prefer to go it alone), but I did draft up my own biographical account. It got so long that I never did get to a point where it was ready to publish. The working title has always been, "I'm Too Honest To Be a Christian." At this point, it's substantial enough to be published in book-length form, but that will be for another day. Though I'm in my forties, I'm just getting started, you know.

I have not considered doing a podcast because, for one thing, I never thought of doing so. I'm a much better writer than I am an orator, and also, I don't have the slightest inkling on how to do a podcast. Well, you've sewn the seed, as Christians would say. Perhaps one day I might give it some serious thought, but I don't foresee

myself putting out very interesting podcasts, to be frank. Writing is my medium because it can be reviewed and edited before publishing, and I don't think reciting something that is written would make for a very interesting audio file. Perhaps I'm just selling myself short, a tendency I have. I was once invited to be interviewed for a television broadcast. I backed down simply because I didn't think I was ready. That was almost 10 years ago. I still don't think I'm ready. I'm still doing my homework. The work that I post on my blog is the work that I'd be ready to turn in for a homework assignment. There's so much more work to do. I have many years of nurturing left to do.

I enjoyed reading your comment above, and am gratified that readers who visit my blog see the value in asking defenders of Christianity to explain how their god can be reliably distinguished from something they may merely be imagining. Since imagining is something that any human being beyond a very early age can do, the challenge I have presented before apologists is legitimate. Less mature believers are more likely to attempt a serious answer to the challenge, while more seasoned "saints" will either ignore it or attempt to turn it on me somehow. None will be able to answer it. It's a stumper which I would encourage any serious thinker to consider.

It is true that, in the case of his god-construct, the theist has no alternative to "forming a mental image of something not actually present to the senses," but this is the case *even if the theist claims that there are things in nature which indicate that his god is real* (which he will predictably do most emphatically). At this point, the theist may be expected to cite certain things that are in fact real as evidence of his god's alleged reality. A pretender will always try to use the real to validate the unreal. Unfortunately for the theist, it easily becomes obvious that whatever he lists as evidence of his god's existence could easily be cited as evidence for the existence of anything one might imagine. The solar system and the orbits of celestial bodies, for instance (a common example raised by Christian apologists), can easily be cited as evidence for the existence of Geusha as it can as evidence for the existence of the Christian god. After all, Geusha can do whatever the Geusha-believer imagines it capable of doing, just as the Christian god can do whatever the Christian believer imagines it capable of doing. This can include creating entire universes, arranging the planets in what is called an "orderly" fashion, creating biological organisms and claiming that they have been made in its image, etc. The only limitation on what an imaginary being can do, is what its imaginer can imagine.

It will also be noted that anything the theist cites in the universe as "evidence" of his god's existence requires one to accept as evidence that which metaphysically contradicts what it's alleged to serve as evidence for. Let the believer point to the solar system and the orbits of celestial bodies as evidence for his god's existence. His god, it must be remembered, is supposed to be supernatural, immaterial, infinite and incorruptible. It is for the alleged existence of this supernatural, immaterial, infinite and incorruptible being that the solar system and the orbits of celestial bodies are supposed to serve as evidence. However, the sun, planets, moons, asteroids and space debris which make up the solar system, are all natural, material, finite and corruptible in nature. So the believer is essentially saying that natural, material, finite and corruptible things are evidence of something that is supernatural, immaterial, infinite and incorruptible. But as I ask in my blog Is Human Experience Evidence of the Christian God:

How does that which is natural, material, finite and corruptible serve as evidence of that which is supernatural, immaterial, infinite and incorruptible? In other words, how does A serve as evidence of non-A?

Or,

How does something serve as evidence of that which completely contradicts it?

No theist has been able to provide an intelligible answer to questions of this sort, just as no theist has been able to identify in clear terms some objective method by which we can reliably distinguish between what he calls " the supernatural" and what he may merely be imagining.

Notice how the practice of defining in terms of negatives can easily open the door to the imagination as one's only guide to mystical "knowledge." As you state: "Immaterial means other than material, other than matter and energy." Well, *to what* does "immaterial" then refer? They tell us what it *doesn't* refer to, but not what it *does* refer to. I can imagine anything and say it is "other than material, other than matter and energy," and yet characterize it in ways that are understandable only by reference to things we have observed in reality (which involve matter and energy) but rearranged in various ways so as not to resemble those things against which they are contrasted too closely. For instance, I can imagine *Wod*, and claim that Wod is "immaterial," and yet Wod hears us (just as biological organisms, which have physical ears, can do), Wod sees what we do (just as biological organisms, which have physical eyes, can do), Wod speaks (just as biological organisms, like human beings, can

do), Wod

And yet by calling Wod "immaterial," I am claiming that Wod does what we do, but in ways fundamentally different from the ways we do those very same things. The notion "immaterial" is understood only by negating that against which it is contrasted, namely material things. What is something that is "immaterial"? Well, it's not material. That of course only tells us what it is *not*, not what it *is*. And does the theist identify the means by which we can have awareness of what he calls "immaterial"? No, he really does not. By pointing to "revelation," he is essentially confessing that it all boils down to imagination.

Typically apologists associate "immaterial" with mental activity. In fact, they typically cite some type of psychological phenomenon as an example of something "immaterial" in the effort to validate their assertion of the existence of "immaterial" entities. But this only brings us closer to the believer's imagination. He's basically telling us that his immaterial god is essentially similar to psychological activity by comparing the former to the latter, and by citing the latter as an example of the category to which the former is supposed to belong. By characterizing their god as an "immaterial entity," theists fall right into a trap of their own making. Hence my challenge, and hence their universal failure to answer it.

Regards,
Dawson

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