

Lord Oda on Faith

Attentive readers will recall my response to the commenter “Singh” where the commenter assumes that I “despise Christians.” On numerous occasions I’ve had to correct this common misperception. For if there were no Christians, my blog would probably lose some of its entertainment value. Indeed, at [Incinerating Presuppositionalism](#), Christians provide the entertainment, for they *are* the entertainment.

[Recent comments](#) by a visitor to my blog, who posts under the moniker Lordodamanor, are no exception. This fellow kindly dropped by to offer his comments, and they are well worth exploring. Also, although I think his moniker is quite creative, I decided to shorten it for the purposes of my interaction with his comments.

Now, in my essay [Faith as Belief Without Understanding](#), I had written:

One is that the bible is painfully ambiguous in its use of the word 'faith'.

Lord Oda lifted this one statement from my essay and offered the following response to it:

Thanks for proving that you've never read, or have never understood Scripture. Unequivocally Jesus states, "You will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free."

And I thank Lord Oda for proving that he has to ignore everything else I said beyond what he had quoted in order to conclude that I have “never read, or have never understood Scripture.” Believers love to accuse not only non-believers of failing to “understand Scripture,” but other believers as well. This naturally implies that he accuser believes he understands it in order to make such statements about others. Unfortunately, however, because of overuse, it loses credibility quite quickly.

But I will say that knowing the truth has in fact set me free. Learning just how false Christianity is has indeed set me free from the psychological sanctions and cognitive disabilities which this horrific worldview uses to decapitate man’s spirit.

Lord Oda continues:

You quoted Hebrews 11:1, but inaccurately expound it. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Estin de pistiv elpizomenwn upostasiv, pragmatwn elegxov ou blepomenwn. To unpack this: Pistis is derived from a root that means immovable, the foundation, the rock, the essential, basis, elemental, base knowledge. Hupostasis means that which is the substance, again, elemental. Elpizo, is the thing expected. To put this back together, faith is faith is faith, or knowing is knowing is knowing, or faith is the essence of hope. Or, faith is the possession of the thing hoped for.

Here Lord Oda clearly thinks that “faith” has to do with “knowing,” for his summary of his interpretation of the Greek text of Hebrews 11:1 equates “faith is faith is faith” with “knowing is knowing is knowing.” But the definition given in Hebrews, even Lord Oda’s parsing of the original Greek, does not support this interpretation. Immovable foundations (let alone rocks!) do not necessarily mean “knowledge” or “knowing”; nor does “substance” or “the thing expected.” It says nothing about “knowing” or “knowledge” (and even less about conceptualization). Christians are habit-prone to casually assuming this is the case (as common parlance clearly indicates this), but even the several models of faith that the rest of Hebrews 11 holds up as examples of faith are not examples of “knowing”; on the contrary, most are examples of acts of will.

For example, look at Hebrews 11:4:

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain

Making an offering is an example of an act of will. It states nothing about “knowing” something or acquiring “knowledge.”

Look at Hebrews 11:7:

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house

Again, we have another example of an act of will. “By faith Noah... moved with fear, [and] prepared an ark...” This is an example of action, not “knowledge.” Moreover, fearing something is not the same thing as knowing something. Emotions are not knowledge, nor are they a means of validating knowledge claims.

Hebrews 11:8 is especially damning for Lord Oda’s association of faith with “knowing”:

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

Here we have as an example of faith an act of will (“By faith Abraham... obeyed...”), and it states explicitly that this act of will was performed without the benefit of knowledge (“not knowing whither he went”). In fact, the only instance of any form of the word “know” which occurs in all of Hebrews 11 (the so-called “faith” chapter) is specifically to indicate a lack of knowledge rather than a possession of it. If this example of faith is any indication, it is better defined as the willingness to act on an assumption even though you don’t know it’s true or simply don’t believe it.

The example of Abraham’s faith, which Hebrews upholds as a model for all believers to emulate, shows just how dangerous faith is. Hebrews 11:17 makes this crystal clear:

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

Here the author of Hebrews alludes to the story found in Genesis 22, where Abraham is ordered by his god to prepare his only son as a burnt offering, a sacrifice to a deity that wouldn’t need any offerings in the first place. With such stories the bible shows that when a person guides his life by faith (in this case, action without understanding), it poses a direct threat to one’s values. (See also my [Notes on the Story of Abraham and Isaac in Gen. 22.](#))

Now none of what Lord Oda states here challenges what I had stated in my essay [Faith as Belief Without Understanding.](#)

Curiously, Lord Oda also said:

Analogously, water is H₂O.

I guess I fail to see the analogy between faith and “water is H₂O.”

Now, if faith is best defined as “the possession of the thing hoped for,” as Lord Oda has indicated, why doesn’t the bible define it in this manner rather than in the manner that Hebrews 11:1 defines it? Blank out.

Lord Oda continues his parsing of the Greek in Hebrews 11:1:

Pragma, means fact, a proven thing done. Blepo, has a wide variety of meaning, but for this context it simply means to observe and coupled with Ou meaning not, ou blepo expresses the unseen.

Same problem here: “fact” does not mean “knowledge” or “knowing,” and neither does “the unseen.” Indeed, what Lord Oda gives us here simply shows us that whatever faith does mean, it slashes off one avenue of objective input by which knowledge of reality is gained by human beings, namely eyesight.

Now, it is clear that Hebrews associates faith with *hoping*, and Lord Oda goes so far as to suggest that “faith is the essence of hope” or “faith is the possession of the thing hoped for.” There is in fact an intimate correlation with hoping when someone affirms a religious position on faith (he affirms it actually because he *hopes* it is true). But that correlation, as we shall see, is not quite as Lord Oda would have it, nor does this correlation comport with Lord Oda’s association of faith with knowledge. It must be stressed that *hoping is not the same thing as knowing*. In fact, we have to know something before we can hope for anything, but when we hope for something, that is not the same thing as knowing it. As I pointed out in [my essay](#),

Hoping for something does not produce assurance. I could hope for a million dollars, but there’s no assurance in this of receiving it. Needless to say, my hoping does not assure its own fulfillment.

Christian faith, then, is the hope that the gospel story is true, nothing more. It is the hope that Jesus was real, that Jesus really died for the sinner's sins, that Jesus really rose in resurrection, that there really is an afterlife, and that the promise of living in paradise for eternity is really the reward for devotional worship, etc.

Of course, one can hope all he wants, but reality prevails; reality will not conform to one's hopes. Pointing such facts out, however, simply makes atheists a bunch of spoilsports in the minds of those who would prefer to indulge these hopes. But in fact, it is better for man's life and his need for values that he conform his hopes to reality as much as possible (e.g., I hope the business meeting I have this afternoon goes smoothly), rather than breaking from reality in preference for hopes which are simply untrue and have their basis in mystical fantasies (e.g., I hope an invisible magic being will guide my steps and vanquish all my enemies). With the latter he invites the cognitive hazard of confusing his fantasies with reality, and such misidentification of reality can easily lead to destruction. But perhaps destruction does not concern Christians; after all, they are taught to pray "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (cf. Mt. 6:10), which of course - on most interpretations - would entail the wholesale destruction of the earth as it is now. And as I have already pointed out, the lesson of the story of Abraham and Isaac from Genesis chapter 22 shows just how dangerous faith in invisible magic beings can be.

Also, Lord Oda's interpretation of Hebrews 11:1 as suggesting that "faith is the possession of the thing hoped for," seems difficult to harmonize with Paul's understanding of the essence of hope, which he gives us in Romans 8:24-25, where he writes:

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? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

Now first off, it should be clear that this verse is entirely compatible with my interpretation of Christian faith as "the hope that the gospel story is true." But is it consistent with the view that "faith is the possession of the thing hoped for"? It would not at all be unnatural, in light of what Paul writes here, to suppose that "hope that is *possessed* is not hope: for what a man *possesseth*, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we *possess* not, then do we with patience wait for it." This would be a natural reading because both Paul's version as given in Romans and the version I have proposed here reduce to the same common principle: we don't hope for what we already have in hand. Ironically, what Paul says of hoping, the same can be said of coveting. For one does not covet what he already possesses.

So Paul and the author of Hebrews - if Lord Oda's interpretation of Hebrews 11:1 is correct - seem to be quite out of sync with each other. But this would not be a first by any means.

Lord Oda then states:

So, the bible is not "painfully ambiguous." It is exacting, expansive, extensive in its definition.

Unfortunately for Lord Oda, parsing Hebrews 11:1 is not sufficient to remove ambiguity from the bible's use of the notion of faith. When I say that "the bible is painfully ambiguous in its use of the word 'faith'," I mean the *bible* as a whole. I am certainly not restricting my evaluation to merely one verse of one chapter of one book of the bible (e.g., Hebrews 11:1) as Lord Oda seems to think. And it's true, various passages in the bible use the word 'faith' to indicate a wide assortment of things. So explaining how just one passage in the bible conceives of faith, does nothing to address the larger picture as I have indicated.

For instance, some bible verses treat faith as an act of will (e.g., the examples of faith given in Hebrews 11), while others as a kind of force endowing believers with some special power or ability. Examples of this would include the episode in Mt. 9 where a woman who "was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years" (vs. 20) was healed when she touched the hem of Jesus' robe; the author of the gospel has Jesus say to her, "thy faith hath made thee whole" (v. 22; see also Mk. 5:34, 10:52, Lk. 8:48, et al.); elsewhere the ability to receive miraculous healing is affirmed as an expression or result of faith (e.g., Mt. 9:29, Acts 14:9); or the ability to cast mountains into the sea (cf. Mt. 17:20). Peter's ability to walk on the sea with Jesus (cf. Mt. 14:28-30) is also suggested to be made possible because of faith, for when Peter grew frightened and began to sink as he was trying to walk on the sea, Matthew has Jesus rebuke Peter with the oft-repeated slogan "O thou of little faith," indicating that had Peter more faith, he wouldn't have been able to walk on the sea just as normally as Jesus did.

Other passages suggest that faith is a kind of epistemic faculty. For instance, in II Cor. 5:7 the apostle Paul famously notes that Christians "walk by faith, not by sight." Let's hope they stay off the streets if that's the case. This is how faith seems to be understood in much common parlance among Christians themselves in their

daily walk as Christians. Very frequently I have myself heard Christians speak as if they “know” some truth on the basis of faith. Lord Oda’s own interpretation of Hebrews 11:1, where he suggests a semantic kinship between “faith is faith is faith” and “knowing is knowing is knowing” indicates that he may be this kind of Christian himself. Just how faith is supposed to work as an epistemic faculty is never explained, either in the bible itself (which tends not to explain much of any use of the word in the first place) or by Christians who employ the term in this manner. Faith is thus used as a kind of non-cognitive putty which shores up gaps of ignorance in order to underwrite one’s affirmations with an air of piety. Often the goal is to fetch a series of “Amen, brother!” exclamations from one’s peers, thus signaling the verification of club membership. Agreement with other minds is often more valuable to the devoted believer than actually validating his verdicts.

Sometimes ‘faith’ seems to denote an entire belief system taken as a whole. For instance, we read in Romans 1:5 where the apostle Paul writes of “obedience to the faith”; and in Acts 6:7 where “a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” In Acts 13, we read of a sorcerer who sought to turn a believer away “from the faith” (v. 8).

Interestingly, according to some gospel passages, faith is something that can be seen (cf. Mk. 2:5, Mt. 9:2).

And yet other passages use the word ‘faith’ to indicate the degree of commitment adherents might have to the devotional program of the religion (cf. II Cor. 1:24, I Thes. 3:5, James 1:3, Rev. 13:10).

Of course, there are times when ‘faith’ seems to equate ‘belief’ - especially belief that is approved and commanded to be accepted as true (apparently the command of an invisible magic being is supposed to serve to “justify” such beliefs). For instance, it is telling that some versions (e.g., the KJV) translates Mk. 6:6 to say “he marvelled because of their *unbelief*,” where others (e.g., the NIV) translate the same passage as saying “he was amazed at their *lack of faith*.” Similarly, in Jn. 20:27 (the only verse in the KJV version of this gospel to come back as a result in a search for the keyword ‘faith’), the evangelist has his Jesus console Thomas the doubter with the words “be not faithless, but believing.” Apparently on this view, faith as “believing” is subject to command.

What’s clear, however, is that Hebrews 11:1 is the only point in the whole bible where an author attempts to provide an explicit understanding of what faith is supposed to mean. Virtually all the other passages, while contextually indicating a wide variety of meanings, clearly assume that the reader “just knows” what is meant by the term in question. Many passages simply repeat faith-based slogans (e.g., “O thou of little faith”), and others similarly emphasize the supposition that there are various degrees of faith; faith can be great or weak, increased, etc. Such passages offer nothing in the interest of understanding just what faith is supposed to be, thus perpetuating the ambiguity I and many other active-minded critics have observed.

So in fact the meaning of the notion of faith is indeed shrouded in ambiguity throughout the bible, and this ambiguity is a result of varied usage in widely disparate contexts conveying different meanings which no single definition (e.g., the one found in Hebrews 11:1) can suit. In fact, the variety in meanings of ‘faith’ is a result of many authors working from different theological assumptions and backgrounds contributing works which were later stitched together as if they were all affirming the same “truths.”

Lord Oda also wrote:

Calvin in his Institutes takes an entire book, along with many references elsewhere to explore the meaning, not obliquely, but rather exegetically, with incurrence, understanding the critical nature of faith's precise definition and operational application.

I'm aware of the fact that various theologians throughout history can spend volumes slicing and dicing words and phrases ad nauseum as they contend for their desired outcome in the battle to see who can fit the most angels on the head of a pin. But that just underscores the problem here: If the bible were so “exacting” as Lord Oda asserts, why would Calvin need to devote a whole book to “explore the meaning” of faith? The volume that a theologian seems to need to get to the bottom of an issue only suggests that the issue in question is not quite as simplistic as popular defenders might like to make them out to be.

Personally, I see faith as a covering term for a most unsightly symptom which is inherent particularly to religious practice. That symptom is the believer’s devotion to the primacy of consciousness metaphysics as expressed in various religious talking points, such as mystical belief in the supernatural, prayer, affirmation of so-called “religious truths” like the resurrection, the afterlife, the existence of invisible magic beings and places like

heaven and hell, etc. As a covering term, its function is to disguise the fact that such mystical beliefs and practices have their basis in hopes which make a sharp departure from reality and turn inward into one's own imaginative fantasies. Passages such as Mk. 11:22 where Jesus commands his disciples to "have faith in God," suggest that faith is a kind of make-believe switch that the believer can flip on when things get emotionally difficult. The word 'faith' thus acts as a kind of signal for the believer to disengage from reality and turn on his religiously-infiltrated imagination to effect the [mood swing that is Jesus](#). Corporately, use of the word 'faith' is a signal for other believers nearby to retreat into the imaginary realm of religious devotion, for only in that realm will they see "the truth" of what is being spoken; for what religion considers "truth" is not of this world, not of this reality, but of a fantasy that has no basis in fact. Faith is thus the doorway to [the cartoon universe of theism](#).

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian Psychopathy](#), [Faith](#), [imagination](#)

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

3 Comments:

[Chris](#) said...

Dawson,

You have a gift I must say. I do enjoy your incinerating analysis and look forward to the next volley of arrows. Its a little like the Roman Colloseum in the IP, but I would imagine that the Christians of old would rather do battle with you than the wild beasts.

Would you mind explaining to me your theory of the origins of the universe in general and mankind in particular. I would like to read your thoughts on how this random collection of atoms and molecules can somehow form themselves into a sentient being capable of pondering his own beginnings. You can link other writings you've done on this if you care to.

Thank you,

Chris

[October 02, 2007 2:28 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hello Chris,

I'm glad that you have come back to me.

Chris: "You have a gift I must say."

Why, thank you, Chris.

Chris: "I do enjoy your incinerating analysis and look forward to the next volley of arrows."

Indeed, sharp and penetrating. That's how I like it. So stay tuned! Lots more on the way.

Chris: "Its a little like the Roman Colloseum in the IP,"

How so? Participation here is strictly voluntary. No one is forced to take sides against me.

Chris: "but I would imagine that the Christians of old would rather do battle with you than the wild beasts."

I would think so as well. People can reason with me, if they so choose. But you can't do that with wild animals.

Chris: "Would you mind explaining to me your theory of the origins of the universe in general..."

It seems that this was explained to you before. See for instance my blog [Responding to Chris](#).

Anyway, I don't have a theory of the "origins" of the universe because I don't think the concept 'origin' properly applies to the universe. To ask what the origin of the universe is, is essentially to ask what the origin of existence is. For on my view 'universe' means the sum total of all existence. Existence is eternal - something has always existed. I certainly don't think existence originated in non-existence. Either we start with existence (as I do), or with non-existence and then try to figure out how existence got here. But once you posit a *cause* of existence, you are already positing existence and thus double-crossing the very assumption that generated the alleged need for an explanation in the first place. It's another instance of having your head up your assumptions, as Price might put it.

Also, I certainly do not think that the universe is the result of the activity of some magic consciousness. I've never seen any good reasons whatsoever to suppose this is the case.

Chris: "...and mankind in particular."

This is a scientific issue. I am not a scientist. So if your interest in this matter is genuine, you might want to consult a scientist. I would suggest starting with Dr. Zachary Moore over at [Goosing the Antithesis](#). He's certainly more well-read on the topic than I am.

Regards,
Dawson

[October 02, 2007 6:45 PM](#)

[Chris](#) said...

Dawson,

How did you come about your world view? Are you from a family of critical thinkers? Generally, most people have adopted the religion, or the philosophy of their parents. What is your story?

Chris

[October 03, 2007 11:31 AM](#)