

Saturday, October 28, 2006

### Those Delicate Christian Sensibilities

Much of Paul's [recent attempt to discredit me](#) is so preoccupied with his attempts to flex his rhetorical muscles that I had to stop myself as I was reading through it to ask: what is he trying to say? Is he really expending all this effort just to prove that the expression "invisible magic being" is pejorative? To say that a word or expression is "pejorative" means that it has a belittling effect in some way. As we go through life, we encounter some individuals whose feelings are quite delicate and consequently easily hurt. This is often a sign of [emotional insecurity](#). But is this all that Paul wants to prove, that his feelings are tender and that he can't take [what Christianity itself dishes out](#)? This seems such a meager gain that it would hardly be worthy of his time and energy. It's obviously very important to Paul, so why not let him have it? After all, all he's essentially arguing at that point is that his feelings have been hurt. Okay, so what? Paul proves once again that he can dish it out, but he can't take it. Fine.

Meanwhile, I wonder if those whom he hoped to impress (namely his fellow Triaboogers and those who come to drink the "Serious Trinitarian Theology" Kool-Aid) are in fact really dazzled by Paul's overt efforts to mimic Steve Hays. They may themselves be so anxious in their faith that they may very well be.

Throughout his cliché-soaked diatribe, Paul tells us about himself as he attempts to dole out his usual series of accusations that I have committed some heinous fallacy or other, and in so doing supplies us with a model exercise in [projection](#). In fact, we learn this time that my "method" is "fallacy ridden," while we're apparently supposed to believe his method is pure and untarnished. He calls my writing "hubristic," which probably means that he's envious of my ability and self-confidence. He says that I "argue by slogans." In other words, I'm quotable and he's afraid my particular way of stating things will become household expressions one day. He says that the purpose behind my use of certain expressions is "to produce thoughtless knee-jerk reactions of agreement from the hoi polloi on the familiarity of the words, rather than on reason." (Keep in mind that this is coming from someone who believes the central tenets of his worldview on faith.) He likens my blog posts to a logo for a failing sports team that is intended to "induce fear, or respect," but it's not clear why he makes such a comparison. Perhaps he thought it might sound catchy, or maybe my posts strike fear in him (we already know his feelings have been hurt). He says that I "draw absurd extensions from the claims of [my] interlocutors," but he apparently fails to realize that many of my interlocutors (e.g., Christian theists) promote an absurd position while seeking to cloak it under a credible guise; just undo the façade and the absurdity shines right through (if it didn't already). He then accuses me of ad baculum: "He takes the fear of having a 'cartoon worldview' and exchanges that for honest interaction with the other side." Who's afraid of having a "cartoon worldview"? In response to my point that Christianity subscribes to the cartoon universe premise, many Christians have essentially told me "so what?" Paul tells us about himself as he stands limp before the mirror I've held up before him. This is no ad baculum, for I am not threatening the use of force or suggesting that some harm will come to my interlocutor as a result of denying my conclusions. The "obey or suffer" tactic of ad baculum is religion's own, since religion dispenses with reason in the first place and insists that people believe its hocus-pocus balderdash on its spokesmen's say so, or else suffer the consequences. He says that I "also employ much argumentum ad ignominiam," which apparently means that I think that I "can shame [my] opponent into submission by the use of employing claims which commit" the laundry list of fallacies he attributes to me. He apparently thinks that one's efforts to educate and reason with people are a shaming tactic. Again, Paul tells us about himself here. Mind you, my approach to things is not "believe, or be condemned for all eternity," or "believe, because I say so," or "believe, because the ancients believed," or "believe, or else you will be mocked by a group of Triaboogers who have nothing better to do." Far from it. In fact, you'd think that someone like Paul might show a little gratitude for the one-on-one attention he has received in an area where he's in desperate need for help. On the contrary, however, like a yapping junkyard dog, he's prone to biting the hand that feeds. Instead of gratitude, Paul offers misrepresentation. For instance, he charges me with arguing "that the 'all' in Jesus' claim that 'all things are possible' includes the possibility that God could cease to exist," but that is not what I argued at all. If he's not mischaracterizing my position, he either never understood it, or he suffers from an early onset of senility and needs to go back and review [what I have stated](#). On the whole, Paul's latest attempt to roast me is set up on a grand projection, attributing to me the very playbook which Christian apologists themselves follow. For examples, just read Paul's post or [the comments he leaves in response to mine](#).

Here's another example: non-believers are supposed to be afraid of having the "evolutionist" worldview, because it allegedly relies on something called "Chance" - a word which is intended to cause a knee-jerk reaction of its own - even if they have never affirmed something called "evolutionism" or suggested that "Chance" governs things in some

haphazard, nonsensical manner (like an invisible magic being might). Or, non-believers are supposed to be afraid of having no “account for” consciousness if we do not kowtow to an invisible magic being. But if that invisible magic being is itself said to be conscious, how does kowtowing to it “account for” consciousness? Blank out. Then there’s this: Paul plays dumb when confronted with the Objectivist axioms, claiming that he doesn’t see how the axiom that existence exists argues against the existence of an imaginary being; on Paul’s myopic understanding, even beliefs in non-Christian deities are supposed to be compatible with this fact. In terms of logical implications, the upshot for Paul is that, in his mind, *anything goes* (or [as the bible puts it](#), “with God all things are possible”). No position, so long as it affirms the existence of an invisible magic being, is incompatible with any fact in reality. If you pay attention to Paul’s defensive tactics, you’ll see that they can be used to safeguard belief in any invisible magic being with only the slightest modification on non-essentials; he has already provided the fundamentals needed to squirm out of any tight place. Playing dumb is most appropriate for Christians, for they are not to lean on their own understanding, but to replace reason with faith-based fear and trembling.

But we’re supposed to believe that Paul is above all suspicion as he once again takes aim against me. This time Paul is concerned to “debunk” my explanation for my use of the expression “invisible magic being” to refer to his and everyone else’s gods, demons, angels, devils, and other imaginary personal agents. He must really think this expression is a threat to the sanctity of Christ to go to all this effort to skewer something he wants to consider useless. But even here Paul doesn’t pass up an opportunity to take yet another potshot at me. He says that I am “playing dumb” when James Anderson himself [makes it a point to tell me](#) that he “never understood why you feel the need to pepper your writing with playground pejoratives like ‘invisible magical beings’, which add nothing to your analysis.” I guess I’m supposed to be wrong for taking the man at his word; for Paul says that I “know precisely why James Anderson thinks the term ‘invisible magic being’ is ‘pejorative’.” But if Anderson himself confesses that he “never understood” this, on what basis would I turn around and call James a liar here? Paul must think I should have more understanding than Dr. Anderson does. Should I now be flattered that he thinks so highly of me? Besides, even if I do know why James thinks this term is pejorative (by calling it that, his feelings must have been hurt as well), I’m still most willing to explain why I use it. So what’s the problem here?

Let’s take a closer look at some of the things Paul stated in his blog, and see what we will see.

### Imagination as the Only Means of Mystical Awareness

In my explanation of why I think the expression “invisible magic being” is appropriate, I wrote:

In a nutshell, I use the term “invisible magic being” because I think it accurately captures the imaginary personal entity that Christians and other religionists insist exists. In fact, it seems dubious to me that any religionists would consider my use of this expression ‘pejorative.’

Paul responded to this, saying:

We’ve made no progress. Well, we can add a new fallacy. Bethrick constantly peppers his posts with question begging epithets (e.g., “imaginary” personal entity). This is the fallacy of slanting. Bethrick uses terms like this to denote as well as connote an evaluating attitude.

With his head fuming, Paul seeks to find me guilty of yet more fallacies. This time it’s the fallacy of slanting. This fallacy is [explained as follows](#):

Deliberately omitting, de-emphasizing, or overemphasizing certain points to the exclusion of others in order to hide evidence that is important and relevant to the conclusion of the argument and that should be taken into account of in an argument.

Keep this description in mind. We will refer back to this at a later point in my analysis of Paul’s blog.

In the meantime, however, we must ask (since Paul accuses me of committing this fallacy): *what “evidence that is important and relevant” does he think I’m trying to hide?*

Paul says I “constantly pepper [my] posts with question begging epithets,” citing as an example my use of the expression “imaginary personal entity.” The “personal entity” part does not upset him, but referring to Christianity’s god and other invisible magic beings (e.g., demons, angels, devils, etc.) as “imaginary” does. Apparently it spoils the fun; someone who

invests his emotions in an [imaginary friend](#), for instance, surely resents it when others remind him that it is merely imaginary. But how is referring to the Christian god as imaginary "question begging"? Christian apologists are easily frustrated when non-believers do not take their mystical claims seriously enough to assemble serious refutations in every breath. But if their god is not real, why would anyone need to prove that it is not real? I certainly accept no onus to prove that Zeus does not exist; I certainly accept no onus to prove that Geusha does not exist. Why would I accept an onus to prove that the Christian god does not exist? The arbitrary deserves no refutation. Attempting to prove that an invisible magic being does not exist only feeds into the believer's delusions by dignifying them. Besides, I'm a *non*-believer: what is so difficult to understand about this? Am I begging the question by "assuming that God does not exist"? Of course not! I'm simply being consistent with my position. Of all people, presuppositionalists should know better here. I'm reminded of Greg Bahnsen's statement:

'Circularity' in one's philosophical system is just another name for 'consistency' in outlook throughout one's system. That is, one's starting point and final conclusion cohere with each other. (*Van Til's Apologetic: Reading & Analysis*, p. 170n.42)

So quickly presuppositional apologists forget their own talking points. Either that, or it's "consistency" when they do it, but fallacious arguing when everyone else does it. Don't be too appalled by the special pleading inherent to the apologist's approach; we'll encounter more of it down below, and it never loses its nastiness.

Paul says that I "use terms [like "imaginary personal being"] to denote as well as connote an evaluating attitude." But couldn't this be said about a sizeable output of anything anyone says? For instance, Paul chooses to call my words "question begging epithets" for its connotative impact; he doesn't explain why he thinks my statements are "question begging" - he's hoping that just by calling them this that it will sound the right signals in his readers' minds. "Look at that!" Paul's readers are supposed to say to themselves as they read through another skewering of a scorned infidel, "His highness Paul used 'question begging'. Didn't Dr. Bahnsen use that very term himself? Paul must be right up there with the grand poobah of presuppositionalism himself!" The only difference is that you don't see me getting all offended by this; I expect nothing more from Paul. It's okay when he does it, but by golly it's not okay when that rascal Dawson Bethrick does it!

At this point it is important to remind my readers why my use of 'imaginary' in this context is justified, lest they forget. Christians have themselves to blame for this, for they provide no alternative to imagination when it comes to considering the claims and descriptions they give of their god. That is, they indicate no *objective* means by which one might acquire awareness of their god. So I have no alternative to relying on my imagination in order to have *any idea* of what they're talking about when they say things like "God created the universe" or "God wants you remember the sabbath day!" Christians are no different from Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, animists and other mystics in this respect: one needs to retreat into his imagination to consider what they describe. If I want to "know" what the Christian is talking about when he claims there is a god, a gang of demons, angels, devils, heaven, hell, etc., how am I supposed to have awareness of them beyond their mere say so? Hearsay is not a substitute for direct awareness of something. They tell me that their god created the universe ex nihilo. Well, what inputs from the world that I perceive everyday serve as evidence for this? I look around, but I certainly don't *see* any gods creating universes. But I can *imagine* a lot of things that may come close to what Christians have in mind when they imagine things like this. After all, there was a time when I was a professing Christian myself, back when I simply didn't know any better. But even then, I could go on nothing more substantial than my imagination. What I lacked then is what Christians all around me lack: a rational means by which I could distinguish that which is real from what I was merely imagining. Imagination is the mental faculty we use to visualize what we read in storybooks. For instance, when I read [the story of Jesus quieting the storm](#), I imagine a man dressed in a desert gown raising his hands to the sky and uttering the words "Peace, be still!" and the winds subsequently calming down. What alternative to imagining this do I have? Perhaps I could run out and see if I can rent the movie [Jesus of Nazareth](#) (which has a great score, by the way), but this would only enable me to see how other readers of the same storybook imagined its players and events. So really, I'm stuck here, because Christianity doesn't give me anything more substantial to go on. Either I use my imagination to get at least some idea of what they claim, or I don't and have no idea at all. This isn't my fault.

Now, if Christians think that they have an objective means by which I can have genuine awareness of what they call "God," they need to identify it and explain how it works. I asked one visitor to my blog how I can reliably distinguish what he calls "God" from what he may merely be imagining [here](#) and [here](#). But so far, no answer has been forthcoming. So even when I ask Christians to identify some objective, non-imaginative means by which I can have awareness of the god they describe, they offer me nothing. And from what I have gathered, they don't have anything better than their own imagination. This is exactly what we would expect to be the case if their god were a fiction. Reminding Christians of this greatly frustrates them, because it hampers their evangelism. It keeps the fish they want to catch from unwittingly swimming right into their nets.

## The Real Reason Why Paul is So Upset

Paul wrote:

Next, note that Bethrick isn't certain as to why Christians would consider the use of "invisible magic being" in place of our Holy Lord as disparaging and belittling. Either Bethrick is so thick-headed that he sincerely believes we would find no problem, or he's, again, playing dumb. I opt for the latter, the charitable reading.

I thought I had made it amply clear why I found it dubious that Christians would consider the expression "invisible magic being" pejorative. Recall [what I had written](#):

In fact, it seems dubious to me that any religionists would consider my use of this expression "pejorative." After all, look at what they tell me to believe. Christians, for instance, claim that their god exists, and often refer to it as a "being." They claim that their god is "the supreme being," a "divine being," an "infinite being," etc. So I don't know why Christians like James would find my use of this term bothersome.

Paul takes this statement as evidence that I am "either... so thick-headed" or that I am "playing dumb." As is usual with Christian apologists, their insidious false dichotomies tend to leave out the more reasonable option. In actuality, I'm simply giving the believer the benefit of the doubt here, on the faint hope that he might be capable of the simple integration of what they claim and the fact that they want me to believe what they claim. But if use of this expression hurts their feelings, then all I can really say is: the truth sometimes hurts. So I have three words for Christians with delicate sensibilities: GET OVER IT.

Then Paul made a most quizzical statement:

Everyone knows that God is Dawson's *bête noire*.

Where does he get this idea? And where does Paul get off speaking for "everyone"? How does he know what "everyone knows" about me or anything else? Is Paul omniscient? Has he confused himself with the god he worships? Paul has violated one of the first rules of debate, namely: know thy opponent. Paul's god is no more my *bête noire* than the Muslim's Allah or the Lahu's Geusha. In fact, I find the psychology of mysticism very interesting, enough to make it my object of study. But it should be clear if not already, that the Christian's *bête noire* is anyone who doesn't submit and yield his mind to the Christian's confessional investment. You see, we're the spoilsports, we spoil the fun of the believer's make-believe, and we hamper his efforts. So he resents us, hoping to discredit us (for burning at the stake has been outlawed).

Paul asked:

Does he expect us to believe that he intends no belittlement of God by this phrase?

Does Paul expect us to believe that Jesus was actually resurrected? Notice the tendency to make the non-believer's expectations (whether real or wrongly attributed) so unreasonable as to make him seem utterly daft, while the believer's expectation that we believe a bible full of tales and myths is completely normal. In many ways, the west has not recovered from the Dark Ages.

Paul asked:

Does he not think that "invisible magic being" has negative connotations? If he does not, then he's plain ignorant. If he does, then he's a liar.

So here we have another intentionally disparaging dichotomy: this time I am either "plain ignorant," or I am "a liar." But I'm curious here: Where did I ever say that the expression "invisible magic being" does *not* have negative connotations? I merely said that it is an appropriate term, given what Christians expect us to believe. But that does not mean that it is connotatively sterile. And that's because I realize that the connotative impact of a word or expression can vary from individual to individual. I don't believe in any invisible magic beings, so I'm looking at the matter from a perspective that is not clouded by the confessional investment of someone who's nervous about the potential that such expressions can be appropriately applied to their object of worship. Paul seems to have lost sight of this fact.

Then Paul made the following telling statement:

Dawson acts concerned how we take his claim, but it's obvious he's laughing up his sleeve.

Here Paul identifies what must really be bothering him: he can't stand the thought that I might be laughing at his worldview, even the psychological strain and misery it causes him. He doesn't like it because it tells him immediately that I'm not about to take Christian nonsense seriously. And by making a big deal of it, he's only succeeded in encouraging the continued use of the expression "invisible magic being" to be applied to his object of worship. So the heaps of coals on his head are multiplied as he not only fails to accomplish what he set out to do (namely discredit me), he succeeds where he fears most. Now others just might pick up the term and use it.

Paul demonstrates his impoverished comprehension skills when he writes:

After the glad-handing, Dawson gives us the reasons for why he does not think this term pejorative. He writes,

Christians, for instance, claim that their god exists, and often refer to it as a "being." They claim that their god is "the supreme being," a "divine being," an "infinite being," etc. So I don't know why Christians like James would find my use of this term bothersome.

I never gave these points as "reasons for why [I do] not think this term pejorative." Rather they were the reasons why "it seems dubious to me that any religionists would consider my use of this expression 'pejorative'." There's a difference here that Paul has obviously missed. As I said above, I recognize that the connotation of a word or expression can vary from person to person, so I never argued that the expression "invisible magic being" is not pejorative. Rather, I listed these as reasons why I think Christians would be unreasonable, given what they claim and what they want me to believe, to be so easily offended by such expressions. But then again, Christians seem to be offended by the mere existence of people who do not believe in their invisible magic being, so I admit that I'm granting them more reasonableness and levity than they are probably capable of. If I have erred, it was in choosing to be so generous.

### Invisible Things

Paul continued:

Bethrick's tactic is to take each single word and conclude that we shouldn't have a problem with either "being" or "invisible" used to describe God, and so since "magic" is the only word left then we only have a problem with the phrase because "magic" is in there. But this isn't necessarily so.

My approach to uncovering what Christians might find emotionally upsetting about the expression "invisible magic being" was to analyze the elements in the term in order to isolate the cause of their umbrage. By process of elimination I concluded that, since their own religion claims that their god is both a being and invisible, that they must have a problem with my use of 'magic'. I don't see what is so objectionable about this, but Paul calls this a "tactic" - a word laden with its own connotations - in order to inject an evaluation of his own. I suppose it's okay when he does this, but when I do this it's an instance of the fallacy of slanting. Then again, we must remember that Paul is essentially trying to tell us what hurts his feelings, so I'm willing to let him speak for himself on this.

Paul says that I "seem to confuse words and terms." How so? Which words and terms have I confused? Paul admits:

Of course Christians have used the word "invisible," but it's not the word we're concerned with in Bethrick's case, but the meaning poured into the word.

Again, I'm wondering how carefully Paul read my blog. I explicitly explained what I meant by the term 'invisible' when I wrote:

Christians claim that their god is *invisible* - that is, no one can see it, not even believers themselves.

Notice that even when I do take the care to clarify what I mean, Paul belligerently stampedes over it, completely missing its relevance significant to the very point he is trying to make here. This makes him look quite clumsy.

The point he wants to make is that I have coupled 'imaginary' and 'invisible' together, so that when something is said to be invisible, that implies it is therefore also imaginary. In other words, he's accusing me of poisoning the well when I make use of a word which Christians themselves - as Paul himself admits! - use in describing their god. This is amazing! If anyone wonders why it's so difficult to dialogue with Christians, hear ye hear ye! But it's not at all the case that I equate the two. I cannot see oxygen, for instance, but I would not say that someone is merely imagining if he says that human beings cannot live without it.

Observe how Paul develops his case here point by point:

The “invisible” as used with respects to Jehovah is different than the “invisible” used in, say, the term “invisible friend.”

It is? It seems that if someone says that Jehovah is invisible, he means just what the person who claims to have an invisible friend means to say: that Jehovah cannot be seen, any more than the person's invisible friend. Paul seems to think that “invisible friend” is meant to be understood as imaginary. He writes:

When I tell people that my son has an “invisible friend” they know that this means he has a pretend and imaginary friend. “Invisible” here, then, is used to connote the idea of “imaginary.” Indeed, when people hear that a child has an “imaginary friend” they know that this means he has an “invisible friend.”

Was anyone besides me reminded of the Christian hymn [What a Friend We Have in Jesus](#) when reading what Paul wrote here? But Paul feels differently: “When I tell people that my son has an ‘invisible friend,’” he says, “they know that this means he has a pretend and imaginary friend.” Likewise, when Christians tell me that they have an invisible object of worship, I know that this means they have a pretend and imaginary object of worship. If Paul wants to say that I am “begging the question” for recognizing this fact, then I'm sure Paul's son could turn around and accuse Paul for assuming that his invisible friend is also “pretend and imaginary.” Meanwhile, I'm just being consistent with my “worldview presuppositions.” Paul might say that it's obvious that his son's invisible friend is imaginary. But likewise, I say it's obvious that Paul's invisible object of worship is imaginary. I already pointed out above that Christians give us no alternative on this point. We're just not supposed to point this out, otherwise we're a part of the “bad” world of “unbelievers” who spoil the fun of religious make-believe.

Now, it is true that children often have [imaginary friends](#). But did you know that [many children never outgrow this childhood habit](#)? I wonder if Paul's son really thinks his invisible friend is imaginary. After all, his daddy pretends to have an invisible friend named Jesus, so why would we be surprised when Paul's son picks up the same habit? Like father, like son, they say. Paul is modeling a behavior to his son when he goes to church every Sunday to worship something no one sees. And Paul's response to me for “confusing” invisible and imaginary together, is to point to an instance where this is appropriate! You can see why I like Paul so much - he's a great entertainer, though I don't think he realizes it.

Then Paul appeals to fiction - a [cartoon](#) no less! - in order to seal his point:

Or, take Wonder Woman's invisible jet. In the cartoon this is meant to be real, and so it's not imaginary, but is that what Christians mean when they say God is invisible?

Now this is rich! I have often marveled at how readily believers appeal to fiction in order to substantiate their faith. In this regard, Paul is right on schedule. But Wonder Woman and her invisible jet? Doesn't Paul know that Wonder Woman and her invisible jet are not real??? In the context of a cartoon, such things as Wonder Woman's invisible jet may be “meant” to be taken as real. But that's the case with anything in the context of a fictional realm. One would not enjoy a movie about Abraham Lincoln, for instance, if he were constantly pointing out that it's not really Abraham Lincoln, that it's only an actor dressed up to look like Abraham Lincoln. Going along with the story is a crucial part of the fun. Non-believers are simply those who don't think it's fun any more when people try to take the story out of the storybook and pretend it's all really true and we're supposed to “believe” it all, hook, line and sinker. We're spoilsports is all, and believers resent us for our honesty.

So on this matter, let me just say that Paul's angst is completely misdirected when he aims his phasers at me. For it is not my fault that the invisible and the non-existent look very much alike, and it's not my fault when invisible beings and imaginary beings behave very much alike.

Wonder Woman... That's a classic Manatism!

Let's move on.

Paul wrote:

Bethrick cites I Timothy 1:17 where we read that God is “invisible.” But what does this mean? Bethrick's stuck at the superficial level of words. Of course this deficiency is advantageous for the one who employs equivocation as one of his main weapons. But if one were to be honest with his analysis one would move beyond the similarity of words and into the real of meaning. Only then can real critique be made. This only goes to show that Bethrick has no

interest in honestly engaging Christian theists, instead he quibbles over words.

I love this: "Bethrick's stuck at the superficial level of words." I suppose anyone engaged in a debate which is conducted either verbally or in writing could say this about his opponent. In fact, why can't we say that Paul is "stuck at the superficial level of words," since he's the one who's so anxious to untangle worrisome connotations? And why leave it at that? After all, Paul's god is said to have given its "Word" on everything under the sun (except concepts, of course). Perhaps Paul's god is "stuck at the superficial level of words" as well, since it stubbornly refuses to show itself empirically. I would expect Paul to discount these inferences because of their discomfiting implications for his god-belief. But when Bethrick uses words, well, he's "stuck at the superficial level of words." This is the stuff of compelling apologetics!

Yes, I did cite I Timothy 1:17 to justify my use of "invisible" in the expression "invisible magic being." This verse states:

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Now, this verse seems pretty clear to me. It is saying that the Christian god is "invisible." "But," Paul interjects, "what does this mean?" Well, I explained what I take it to mean in [my blog](#):

Christians claim that their god is invisible - that is, no one can see it, not even believers themselves.

Why is this controversial? Why does this understanding of 'invisible' mean that I am "stuck at the superficial level of words"? What other than words do I have to go by? It's either words or imagination at this point. Apparently Paul thinks I'm wrong not only for using my imagination to get an idea of what Christianity claims, I'm also wrong for taking Christianity's word for its descriptions! So Paul must have some other level of cognition (or non-cognition) in mind, a level which dispenses with words so that we don't risk the hazards of being "stuck at the superficial level of words." What that level might be, remains unidentified. Is I Timothy 1:17 saying that its god is *not* invisible? If I cannot take what the bible says on "the superficial level of words," how am I supposed to understand what it says, let alone believe it? Oh, that's right, [we're supposed to believe, not understand!](#)

But Paul should understand that I am plenty happy to engage Christians honestly. The problem is that I have not found any honest Christians. Theism by its very nature is dishonest; it is dishonest to reality, to truth, to man. And theists, especially those who are anxious to maintain division with non-believers at all costs, are notoriously prone to deception. But for the meanwhile, Paul himself seems content to "quibble over words," for it is with this trifling that he is preoccupied throughout his post.

Observe:

And so what is the Bible trying to convey when it uses the term "invisible" of God? It is indeed true that God cannot be placed into a Petri dish and examined, but that's because he's spirit. He's a person without a body (or, more accurately, God is three persons without a body). He's immaterial.

I had figured that, when the bible says that its god is *invisible*, that means no one can see it. Since Petri dishes did not exist back in Jesus' day (they weren't very scientifically advanced back in those days, invoking in all kinds of invisible magic beings to explain the weather, disease, strange behavior, etc.), I never got the impression from I Timothy 1:17 that it was intended to mean that "God cannot be placed into a Petri dish and examined." But that's the case with the non-existent: it cannot be examined. All one can do is make claims about it ("at the superficial level of words," mind you), and from there the imagination needs to take over in order for religious belief to progress. Here Peikoff makes a salient point:

It has often been noted that a proof of God would be fatal to religion: a God susceptible of proof would have to be finite and limited; He would be one entity among others within the universe, not a mystic omnipotence transcending science and reality. What nourishes the spirit of religion is not proof, but faith, i.e., the undercutting of man's mind. (Leonard Peikoff, "Maybe You're Wrong," *The Objectivist Forum*, April 1981, p. 12.)

So the Christian god's invisibility - that is, its inability to be perceived, empirically detected, and scientifically understood - is crucial to Christianity's mind-game formula. We're not supposed to question its existence simply because we cannot see it. "What, you doofus!! It's invisible! No one can see it! Why expect to see something that's an immaterial spirit that's invisible?" No, we're supposed to be afraid of what we cannot see. When we don't fall for the ploy and show no fear for the Christians' invisible boogeyman, they become exceedingly resentful, as we have seen.

But notice how the attributes that Christians list in describing their god, can be applied to anything one imagines. For instance, let's imagine an invisible being named "Wod." It's invisible, so we shouldn't expect to see it. Also, it's

immaterial, so we shouldn't expect to be able to examine it in a Petri dish. In fact, it's beyond all empirical and scientific scrutiny, and therefore out of the reach of scientific understanding, because of the insufficiency of our sense modalities. We can't perceive Wod by looking out at the world, because our senses are not equipped to give us awareness of immaterial, spiritual beings like Wod. Also, being a spiritual being, Wod is conscious, and knows all your thoughts. Whatever you're thinking, Wod already knew that you were going to think it long before you thought it. Wod is omniscient! He knows everything. There's no knowledge possible that Wod does not already know, so don't think you're wiser than Wod! If you dare think such thoughts, then you'll anger Wod, and you don't want Wod angry at you! Not good! For when Wod gets angry, Wod demands a sacrifice. Wod requires that you sacrifice yourself for Wod's sake. No, Wod does not need your sacrifice; Wod has no needs to begin with. Wod is totally and completely sufficient already, lacking nothing, perfect in every conceivable way, and then some. Wod is great! Wod is omnipotent! Wod is whatever I want Wod to be, because Wod exists only in my imagination, and I control what I imagine. So if you want to know what Wod expects of you, come see me, as I know what Wod wants. Wod does what I want Wod to do, because Wod is nothing more than a figment of my imagination.

And so on...

That's how religion essentially works. Just add the elements of taking it seriously and being afraid that it all might be true, and you have a monstrosity that can debilitate any thinking man, so long as he happens [to swim into your nets](#). The point is that it is easy to make up stuff about something that does not exist. You can even make up reasons to explain why doubters don't have awareness of what you've made up.

But Paul tried to qualify the bible's god being invisible:

I don't think it is necessarily the case that "invisible things" could not be detected. Take Wonder Woman's jet for a thought experiment. From what I remember, people could touch the jet and so there was some sort of empirical investigation that could be done on the jet. So it's conceivable that something invisible could be detected by empirical means. It's not conceivable that pure spirit could be directly investigated by one of the five (or, six) senses.

Paul seems to flip-flop back and forth on whether or not we have some means by which we can acquire awareness of the god he worships. It's invisible, but invisible doesn't necessarily mean that it cannot be empirically detected. Here Paul again slinks back to the cartoon imagery of Wonder Woman's invisible jet. He just can't get away from fiction, can he? How he thinks this can be helpful to his case is quite beyond me. Indeed, it only confirms the primary role of the imagination here.

As we follow him on his circuitous red herring chase, we find that Paul does allow that his god is invisible (for as we saw above, this is crucial to religion's parasitism), but unlike Wonder Woman's invisible jet, "it's not conceivable that pure spirit could be directly investigated by one of the five (or, six) senses." Why not? Well, ultimately because Paul is in charge of his god and what notions like "immaterial" and "pure spirit" - which he uses to describe it - mean. By stipulation, they mean that we'll never be able to acquire awareness of his object of worship by means of one of our five senses (Paul seems to think he has a sixth one that isn't up to the task either). So we know what will *not* work. The question is: what *does* work? When [Canon Michael Cole described his personal encounter with Jesus](#), he forgot to explain how he had such awareness. What he described was really nothing more than a passing *mood*. So Jesus is a *mood*, not an actual person. For the Christian, everything depends on his moodswings, his emotional investment in Jesus-belief. That's why it is so important to Paul to prove that the expression "invisible magic being" is pejorative. Of course, merely being an "unbeliever" is pejorative to the believer in and of itself. So why wouldn't the expressions an "unbeliever" uses in critiquing the Christian god-belief also be pejorative?

Now, it is important to remember that Paul wanted to take me to task for allegedly investing the word 'invisible' with the connotation of 'imaginary' when I cited I Timothy 1:17. We will now see that it was not *that* I invested the word 'invisible' with added connotation per se that bothered him. He likes to supplement words with additional connotations as well, *only he wants to be in charge of approving which connotations can be added*:

I don't think "invisible" is the term to use when describing God's ontological status. Rather, I think "invisible" has *epistemological* and *spiritual* connotations in the Bible. God is "invisible" (I Tim. 1:17) because he "dwells in inaccessible light" (I Tim. 6:16). Frequently "see," as used by Paul, means "understand" (cf. Rom. 1:20, 5:6, 7:23, 11:10; 2 Cor. 10:9, etc.). (Do you see what I mean!) God's "invisible" according to Paul because "He dwells in unapproachable light."

When applied to the Christian god, then, the word 'invisible' really means "beyond human comprehension." And we are expected to accept what is "beyond" our comprehension as knowledge. This furthers the religion's parasitic purpose: to



hoodwink the human mind and bring men into submission. It worked on Paul, and he wants it to work on everyone with whom he comes into contact. The "light" in which the Christian god "dwells" is "unapproachable," because it doesn't exist.

Eager for a someone more authoritative to step into the ring at this point, Paul appeals to Calvin, another deepseated mystic:

He means two things, that God is concealed from us, and yet that the cause of obscurity is not in himself, as if be [he?] were hidden in darkness, but in ourselves, who, on account of the weak vision, or rather the dullness of our understanding, cannot approach to his light. We must understand that the light of God is unapproachable, if any one endeavor to approach to it in his own strength; for, if God did not open up the entrance to us by his grace, the prophet would not say: "They who draw near to him are enlightened." (Ps. 35:5).

So the deficiency responsible for our not being able to perceive the Christian god is in man, not in the Christian god. (Couldn't we say the same thing about Wod?) And yet, the Christian religion says that this god created us in its own image. So what is the origin of this deficiency, if we accept Christianity's premises? We are constantly being reminded that we did not create ourselves. So whatever created us, it created us with this deficiency such that we have no means of perceiving this alleged being which allegedly "dwells in inaccessible light." Calvin says that the reason why "God is concealed from us" is "the dullness of our understanding," but then turns around to say that "we must understand that the light of God is unapproachable." But we were just told that we suffer from "dullness of understanding." How can he proceed to urge us to understand if in fact our understanding suffers from such "dullness"? We're supposed to "understand" that our understanding is "dull." Also, did you ever notice how Christians love to speak for everyone? How does Calvin, if his own understanding is what he says it is of everyone, know that everyone suffers from this "dullness of understanding"? When Christians speak for everyone, let them first speak for themselves. For instance, [when Christian apologist Phil Fernandes says](#)

I just believe that we are very good about lying to ourselves, and only accepting, uh, or interpreting the evidence the way we would like to...

he's telling us about himself, even though he presumes to be speaking on behalf of everyone. Indeed, Christians continually confuse themselves with the omniscient being they worship in their imagination.

Paul concludes:

And so it certainly can be the case that we would even have a problem with Bethrick's use of the word "invisible."

But they don't have a problem when the bible uses the same word. And I'm accused of being "stuck at the superficial level of words"? The question is: Is the Christian god invisible, or not? Why no straight answers here? What is the believer afraid of? Is he afraid of committing himself to a position that will later be shown to be untenable? If not, then why all the squirming and wordplay?

### **Magic and the Supernatural**

We have seen that Paul made a rather weak attempt to discredit my use of 'invisible' in the expression "invisible magic being." His red herring dodges, false dichotomies and fabricated charges have all been answered so far. Now we turn our attention to the last element in the expression that Paul finds offensive, namely the word 'magic'. In my blog on the topic, I had predicted that this word would be the most controversial, and Paul has confirmed that I am right on this point. And it is at this point that Paul's pettiness shifts into higher gear. He writes:

...let's move on then to his justification for applying the term "magic" to God. It's important to note that Bethrick calls magic a "term." The problem is that he runs to the dictionary. Dictionaries do not have terms in them, only words and the building blocks for making a term.

Paul seems to be saying that a term cannot consist of a single word (if that's not what he's trying to say, then he needs to put more effort into making his position clear). But this is not my understanding. In fact, I've never heard that a term cannot be a single word. At the risk of committing more fatal errors (like "running to the dictionary"), I looked up the word 'term' at Paul's preferred dictionary.com. Here's what I found under [the entry for 'term'](#):

1. a word or group of words designating something, esp. in a particular field, as atom in physics, quietism in theology, adze in carpentry, or district leader in politics.

2. any word or group of words considered as a member of a construction or utterance.
3. the time or period through which something lasts.
4. a period of time to which limits have been set: elected for a term of four years.
5. one of two or more divisions of a school year, during which instruction is regularly provided.
6. an appointed or set time or date, as for the payment of rent, interest, wages, etc.

Note that none of these definitions stipulate that a single word cannot be a term. The first two definitions, in fact, specify that a term can consist of *a word* as well as a group of words. And if a term can consist of a single word, why think that "dictionaries do not have terms in them"?

Recall that I had stated:

The controversial element of the expression in dispute, then, must, by process of elimination, be the use of the adjective 'magic'. But in my view, this **term** is wholly warranted.

I used the word 'term' to refer to the adjective 'magic'. According to the definition of 'term' quoted above, this is quite in keeping with the second definition above: "any word or group of words considered as a member of a construction or utterance." If "invisible magic being" is the "construction or utterance" in mind, then 'magic' is clearly a *term* by this definition, since it is a member of that "construction or utterance."

Paul continues with his pettiness:

Also, a dictionary is something like a history book. It simply reports how words have been used by society. They are little more than helpful hints as to how used have been used.

To the extent that this is the case with dictionaries (and I'd say that dictionaries offer more than merely "helpful hints"), it does not at all worry me. We will see that Paul will appeal to common practice in order to argue that the word 'magic' should not apply to his god. But Paul's words here suggest that we have the green light to dismiss common practice as just a matter of how a word has been "used by society" *historically*. After all, the meanings of words do change over time, right?

Paul then writes:

Furthermore, he uses Webster's, but that's not the only dictionary.

Yes, that's true, there are numerous dictionaries out there. I never implied that Webster's is the only one.

Then Paul himself makes a mad dash for the dictionary himself:

Dictionary dot com has "magic" defined in various ways,

- 1.the art of producing illusions as entertainment by the use of sleight of hand, deceptive devices, etc.; legerdemain; conjuring: to pull a rabbit out of a hat by magic.
- 2.the art of producing a desired effect or result through the use of incantation or various other techniques that presumably assure human control of supernatural agencies or the forces of nature. Compare contagious magic, imitative magic, sympathetic magic.

In [my blog](#), readers with above-mediocre comprehension skills will recall that I had stated:

By 'magic' I do not mean "the art of producing illusions by sleight of hand," for such tricks can be performed by human beings who possess no supernatural powers and make no use of supernatural powers. If you slip him enough martinis, a magician might even divulge how he does his tricks.

So it should be clear that I did not have the first definition that Paul cites here in mind.

Let's take a closer look at the second definition that Paul quoted:

the art of producing a desired effect or result through the use of incantation or various other techniques that presumably assure human control of **supernatural agencies** or the forces of nature. Compare contagious magic, imitative magic, sympathetic magic.

This approaches what I mean by 'magic' insofar as it acknowledges the association between magic and "the

supernatural," which is what I have in mind when I use the expression "invisible magic being." This should not be difficult to understand: the idea of magic is intimately associated with belief in the supernatural.

Paul made another run for the dictionary:

The American Heritage dictionary cites these two examples first,

1. The art that purports to control or forecast natural events, effects, or forces by invoking the supernatural.
2. The practice of using charms, spells, or rituals to attempt to produce supernatural effects or control events in nature. The charms, spells, and rituals so used.

This source also acknowledges the association of magic with "the supernatural." Christians want us to believe in "the supernatural," so it seems they should welcome the use of the adjective 'magic' when speaking of their god and other invisible beings. The word 'magic' simply acknowledges the element of supernaturalism that is integral to religious belief.

But Paul is not comfortable with this, so he appeals to what he believes is the popular understanding of 'magic' in order to disqualify its applicability to his object of worship:

It seems, though, that most people have the idea of humans doing something that can be attributed to the divine, and so when the divine works a miracle, that is not "magic."

Paul wants to dismiss the applicability of 'magic' to his god on the grounds that it has customarily been understood to involve human beings attempting to tap into a supernatural source. This is an appeal to custom, which has certain strengths, but also certain weaknesses. I have not taken any surveys on this to confirm or refute what Paul says, but I think there would be several reasons for why many thinkers might "have the idea of humans doing something that can be attributed to the divine," which I will explain. However, just note that even when Paul appeals to custom, the association between magic and supernaturalism is clearly present in his acknowledgement that "most people" have some reference to "the divine" in mind when contemplating stories of magic.

Now one reason why people might think of human beings instead of a divine being proper when thinking of magic per se, is due to preponderance of modeling, not because magic is inapplicable to "the divine." That is, most storybooks which include episodes involving the use of magic center around human beings who encounter seemingly insurmountable challenges but who also possess some favor or privilege (cf. "grace") bestowed on them from some supernatural source (say a miraculous birth, first instance, or an inheritance of some kind). The portrayal of otherwise human characters is not only to make the story interesting, but also to give it some relevance to those who might enjoy reading it. For consider: a story exclusively about a divine being which faces no fundamental alternative as man does (e.g., life vs. death) would make for very boring reading, because it would never face danger or challenge, so such stories would not survive because of their inherent lack of interest. Essentially, there'd be nothing to build a plot with, nor would human readers who do not live entirely in the world of fantasy find much to relate to in such stories. Only if human beings (or personified animals who behave like human beings and have needs similar to human beings) are involved does the story acquire any interest (cf. the book of Genesis). But it does not follow from any of this that the adjective 'magic' is inapplicable to what the Christians describe as their god. I see no problem with calling what the Christian god is said to have done magical. It is said to have created the universe. Did it create the universe through physical effort, collecting materials from here and there and assembling them into planets, stars and galaxies? No, it did so *magically*, by essentially willing it into existence. That's what we've been told to believe. If I saw Samantha Stevens summon a famous personality into her house ex nihilo, I'd call it magic. Why wouldn't I call what Christians say their god does magic as well? I call the energy that is available in the wall outlets throughout my house 'electricity'. Why would I not call the energy that is generated by and distributed from the power plant that feeds my house 'electricity' as well?

The second reason for why some people might resist using the adjective 'magic' when referring to "when the divine works a miracle," is lurking in the passage that Paul himself quoted from Easton's 1897 bible dictionary. Observe:

The Jews seem early to have consulted the teraphim (q.v.) for oracular answers (Judg. 18:5, 6; Zech. 10:2). There is a remarkable illustration of this divining by teraphim in Ezek. 21:19-22. We read also of the divining cup of Joseph (Gen. 44:5). The magicians of Egypt are frequently referred to in the history of the Exodus. Magic was an inherent part of the ancient Egyptian religion, and entered largely into their daily life. All magical arts were distinctly prohibited under penalty of death in the Mosaic law. The Jews were commanded not to learn the "abomination" of the people of the Promised Land (Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:9-14). The history of Saul's consulting the witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28:3-20) gives no warrant for attributing supernatural power to magicians. From the first the witch is here only a bystander. The practice of magic lingered among the people till after the Captivity, when they gradually abandoned it. It is not much

referred to in the New Testament. The Magimentioned in Matt. 2:1-12 were not magicians in the ordinary sense of the word. They belonged to a religious caste, the followers of Zoroaster, the astrologers of the East. Simon, a magician, was found by Philip at Samaria (Acts 8:9-24); and Paul and Barnabas encountered Elymas, a Jewish sorcerer, at Paphos (13:6-12). At Ephesus there was a great destruction of magical books (Acts 19:18, 19). [sic]

All this merely shows that, for the religionist, 'magic' is what *other* religions practice. So naturally, when the term is applied to their *own* religion, they take offense. But where does this offense originate? Well, it originates in the pejorative intentions that prompted religionists in using it to refer to rival religious groups. They invested it with pejorative connotations in order to claim a moral high ground that simply does not exist. The passage states that "Saul's consulting the witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28:3-20) gives no warrant for attributing supernatural power to magicians." [sic] But we don't need the bible's sanction in order to attribute supernatural power to magicians. What is going to happen if we do something that the bible-thumpers don't like? They'll get offended is all. But so what? Even Easton's associates magic with religious ritual. So Paul's citing of Easton's only helps to seal my case.

Paul then confesses the worry that "with so many definitions there's an air of subjectivity to which definition one will choose." I take this as an acknowledgement that there are numerous ways that the word 'magic' can be defined, and thus it could be defined in such a way that my application of it to the Christian god is not inappropriate, given the way Christians describe it.

But Paul continues to pout:

Recall that Bethrick gave Webster's definition and then said that he's "warranted" in applying this term to God. Though he may think he is warranted in applying this term to God, we've actually steered off course now. Bethrick's job, as he told us, was to show how this word was not pejorative as applied to God. But, since "pejoratives" are words meant to belittle or degrade something then it matters not if Bethrick is "warranted" in using the term! Bethrick forgot what he was trying to prove not even four paragraphs into his blog entry!

Where did I say that my "job... was to show how this word was not pejorative as applied to God"? Again, Paul's reading comprehension skills come under question. I stated the purpose of my blog quite explicitly:

James states that he "never understood why" I use this term, so I will take this opportunity to explain it.

Notice that I did not write to refute the charge that "invisible magic being" is "pejorative." I take Paul's tender sensibilities as sufficient evidence that this term has caused him plenty of emotional consternation, and I doubt that there's anything I'd ever be able to say to persuade him from believing that I use this term just to get under his skin. Christians have made it clear to me that they're going to believe what they want to believe, and nothing I can say will make much of an impact either way, even when they have admitted their ignorance on a relevant matter.

Paul suggests that

One should think twice about the "arguments" of a man who can't even keep his own thoughts straight four paragraphs into a argument or defense piece.

And Paul should read a little more carefully, noting the purpose I state for writing something. Meanwhile, I would hope that my readers think about my arguments more than merely "twice." Perhaps Paul said this because he doesn't want people to think about the arguments he gives (whenever he might happen to do so), and skip right to the conclusion, hold up their right hands and say "Amen!"

Paul then feigns (again) to speak for everyone:

We can all agree that Bethrick failed to defend his case and answer James Anderson.

Specifically, defend what case? James expressed that he did not understand why I use a term that he considers pejorative. So I explained it. How did I "fail" in this task? Indeed, Paul seems to have had repeated trouble in simply comprehending what I wrote.

Paul writes:

More than that, I think it is obvious that Bethrick intends his claim that God is an "invisible magic being" to have negative and belittling connotations attached to it, and therefore it is indeed a pejorative.

"Bad Dawson! Bad Dawson! Naughty naughty!!!"

Again, I use the term 'invisible magic being' because it is open-ended. That is my primary purpose in using it: it is intended to cover any postulated mystical entity which is said to exist beyond the reach of our senses and possess conscious powers which we do not observe anywhere in nature (for instance, creating universes, turning water into wine, healing congenital blindness, causing diseases like epilepsy, stilling storms, and other magical feats). If in the meantime the Christian is offended by this, that's not my problem.

Paul then tried to disqualify the definitions which I did cite in my blog from applying to the Christian god. Recall that they were the following:

“the use of means (as charms or spells) believed to have supernatural power over natural forces,”

or

“an extraordinary power or influence seemingly from a supernatural source.”

Paul reacted as follows:

Now, we can knock out the first definition since God doesn't use “charms or spells” to have “supernatural power” over “natural forces.”

I expected as much from the master of trivialities himself. But this is insufficient for while the first definition does include the phrase "the use of means (as charms or spells)," it in no way restricts the means by which magic is plied to only those which it specifically names. By saying "as charms or spells," I take these to be *examples*, not exhaustive possibilities. But even so, how does Paul know that his god "doesn't use 'charms or spells'"? Well, I'm glad you asked. As I pointed out above, Paul "knows" this because he's in charge of what his god is and is not, what it uses and does not use, what it can and cannot do. Paul offers no objective means for going out and confirming what he claims about his god; rather, his stipulation is given on a "take it on my say so" basis. Meanwhile, because of his finely-tuned pettiness, Paul misses the primary point to citing these definitions, which is the association they acknowledge between 'magic' and "the supernatural."

Paul then stated:

Indeed, give[n] the reformed view of providence, there are no such things as “natural forces.”

Um, yeah. Again please: Paul says "there are no such things as 'natural forces'." Try telling this to the victims of Hurricane Katrina, or those who were swallowed up by the December 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean. "...no such things as 'natural forces'"? And people wonder why science and religion are so much at odds with each other? On Paul's view, there's no such thing as causality, inertia, thermodynamics, gravity, centrifical force, friction, aerodynamics, chemical reactions, hydrolics, etc. My, the delusion is strong with this one.

Paul tried to make another stab at the definitions I cited:

Second, these definitions clearly imply the common use of the word in that it is understood that humans are the ones doing the “magical acts.” They “have power” which comes from a supernatural force.

I already spoke to this point above, so I shan't repeat myself. I'll just remind my readers that "common use" does not always coincide with carefully considered use.

Paul made another ill-fated attempt:

Third, even if we applied this to God, this would not be a good definition since it fails to distinguish God from, say, another worker of magic. Stated another way, Dawson has broken one of the rules for making a good definition.

Again, Paul seems not to have read my entry very carefully. Note what I had written:

And contrary to what Anderson says, my use of this expression does in fact add to my analysis in that it covers more than just the Christian god; in addition to Christianity's deity, it also includes any rival deity which non-Christian religionists might imagine.

I don't know how I could have made my point more explicitly clear: I use this term because it is open-ended. I don't want to leave out anything that would apply, so it would be unhelpful to my atheological purposes to specify just the

Christian god, when in fact my points very well may suitably apply to other alleged gods and mystical beings. For instance, when I say that I do not believe in *any* invisible magic beings, it should be clear that I'm not singling out just the Christian god, or just the Islamic god, or just the Lahu god. I'm throwing a net wide enough to engulf them all. The expression 'invisible magic being' is the ultimate trash compactor in this sense.

Paul says that I have "broken one of the rules for making a good definition." He does not identify which rule he has in mind, so it appears to be another toothless charge. In fact, what holds a definition together is the centrality it gives to a conceptual common denominator. In the case of 'magic', the common denominator is the claim to some "supernatural power." This violates no "rules for making a good definition" that I'm aware of.

Paul made one last effort to discount the definitions I quoted:

Fourth, it is clearly obvious that the vast majority of people have something like Harry Potter in mind when they think of "magic." Even when I was a god-hater I never thought of God as "magical." Indeed, in all my research of this term I did not see one instance where Jehovah was ever referred to as magical. However, I did see a plethora of instances where this term was applied to something humans did.

I spoke to this point above as well. Simply, stories involving human beings would be much more interesting and relevant to human readers than stories exclusively about supernatural beings bearing descriptions like those that Christians give of their god. But points like this will not matter much to Paul, for he's bent on special pleading his case. For consider, if we read of someone turning water into wine in a Harry Potter book, Paul's point here acknowledges that most people would have no problem calling it "magic." But Paul insists that it is "pejorative" if we use this word the very same thing happens in a storybook called the Book of John.

Paul says that "in all my research of this term" - he's working on his dissertation, no doubt - "I did not see one instance where Jehovah was ever referred to as magical." So Paul offers us the stable footing of an argument from silence: "I never saw anything referring to the Christian god as 'magical', therefore this word does not apply!" Paul's case doesn't get any stronger than this, and it can't.

Then after sharing his foot-and-mouth disease with his readers, Paul acknowledges an important point:

But, Dawson really has something more basic in mind when he applies this term to God.

Yes, I certainly do. What I have in mind is not "charms or spells" per se, for instance, but the orientation between subject and object. Magic is a name for the power alleged to belong to a subject which holds metaphysical primacy over the world of objects. It's a power that Jesus tapped into in order to perform miracles, and it is a power that Harry Potter taps into in order to get out of sudden difficulties.

Paul then quoted me:

Do not Christians believe that their god has "supernatural power over natural forces," that it possesses "an extraordinary power or influence"? Is their god not said to be "a supernatural source"?

Paul reacted to this as follows:

First, I do not believe in "natural forces."

We saw Paul state this above. It makes me feel very sad for him, as it shows not only how out of touch with reality his worldview is, it also shows how desperate he is to maintain division with those who do not believe in his invisible magic being.

He then wrote:

Second, I don't know what Bethrick means by calling God a "supernatural source."

Well, what do Christians mean by 'supernatural'? Christians think that "the natural order" has a supernatural source. For Christians, that supernatural source is the will of the Christian god. It is conceived as a conscious faculty which has the power to will anything it wants into existence and conform whatever does exist to whatever it wants it to be. I know, bizarre, isn't it?

Paul took another leap of inference:

I take it that Dawson is calling the traditional attribute “omnipotence,” magic. He’s saying, “Hey, God is supernatural, and he has power, therefore he’s magical.” But this is obviously an equivocation. The problem here is that if this is what it is to be “magical” than the term can be applied to nothing else!

Amazing, isn't it? I nowhere affirmed that 'magic' is identical to what Christians mean by 'omnipotence', but here Paul wants to "take it" that I have made such an equation. Why? Well, it allows him to accuse me with another fallacy. So given this end, it doesn't matter what I have stated, the goal of discrediting me outweighs any need to deal with the issues in an honest manner. But I will say this, since he introduced the matter: While I do not say that "magic" means "omnipotence," I would say that the meaning of the word 'magic' is open-ended (as I mentioned above) and thus *subsumes* what Christians mean by 'omnipotence', for the conceptual common denominator - namely the primacy of consciousness - is there. This answers Paul's concern as to whether or not "the term can be applied" to anything else.

Paul again reiterated his point that "'magic' is traditionally understood as the non-supernatural 'tapping in' to the supernatural in order to have some control over the environment, or discern some information from the netherworld," but I have already dealt with this. It's a dead end for Paul for the variety of reasons that I have already spelled out.

Paul ignores the fact that the open-endedness of the word 'magic' allows for a broad spectrum of degrees:

God is not like this in any respect. Actually, what pops into most people's minds when they hear the word “magic” is maybe an image of a Leprechaun. Or Harry Potter. But none of these beings are anywhere close to being like God. It's not even a comparison.

This statement is tendentiously Procrustean, driven expressly to deny to the Christian god rightful membership in a class to which it belongs, just to avoid it from being tarnished with a word that Paul finds personally offensive. The foul odor of Paul's special pleading has become intolerable as he presumes to speak for "most people's minds." No doubt he's been endowed with a magical ability to know "what pops into most people's minds" given certain stimuli. So what if images of Leprechauns and Harry Potter "pop into most people's minds." This by itself is not an argument. Harry Potter, Leprechauns, gnomes, faeries, and the rest may simply represent the lower tiers of the magic continuum. I'm happy to let Paul suppose that his god occupies one of the higher tiers if it makes him feel better.

Paul tries to stipulate the debate into his favor again:

The only way that it's close is if one views the God of the Bible as being a creature like this, but the problem is that this then is not the God of the Bible anymore.

No, that is not the only way. What unites notions like Leprechauns, Harry Potter, faeries, and sundry deities (including the Christian god) has nothing to do with "being a creature." On the contrary, whether something is thought to be a creature or a creator is a non-essential. The questions to ask are: Is the agent in question associated with belief in the supernatural? Does the agent in question possess or at any rate wield a power alleged to be performed by a faculty of consciousness but which we do not find manifested in nature or in man-made machines? Etc. Examples can include, but are not exclusively restricted to: flying on a broomstick, walking on unfrozen water, opening giant doors at the utterance of a command, parting the Red Sea, conjuring reptiles, turning water into wine, endowing love potions with their mystical properties, etc.

### Wishing and the Christian God

Paul then sought to widen the great divide by denying that his god *wishes*. Recall that I had stated:

“According to its spokesmen, this magic-endowed personal agent can wish things into existence (cf. “creation ex nihilo”).”

In response to this, Paul wrote:

Bethrick again makes use of pejoratives (e.g., “wish). The problem is that God doesn't wish. Wishing is usually understood as the desire for something you cannot have, or want really really bad, but it's so unattainable that the only way to get it is by “wishing” for it.

I thought man was “created in the image of God.” How can man do something that god cannot do? At any rate, in one sense Paul is right: his god does not wish, but not for the reasons he has given. Rather, his god does not wish because his god is not real. It would have to be real in the first place in order for it to be capable of wishing. But even his

come-back here is weak, and it would be easy to overcome by a believer who wanted his god to be capable of wishing. Paul says that "wishing is usually understood as the desire for something you cannot have," and applied to human beings, that may certainly be the case at least part of the time. A believer however could easily say that, when applied to his god, the idea of unattainability is logically excluded, for whatever the magic being wants, the magic being gets. After all, this is what we find in the bible. So our would-be believer could easily respond to Paul by saying that he is unnecessarily packing anthropomorphic presuppositions into the meaning of 'wishing'.

But Paul will probably insist until he's blue in the face that his god does not wish. [Look at all the things Paul's god cannot do:](#)

*-verb (used with object)*

1. to want; desire; long for (usually fol. by an infinitive or a clause): I wish to travel. I wish that it were morning.
2. to desire (a person or thing) to be (as specified): to wish the problem settled.
3. to entertain wishes, favorably or otherwise, for: to wish someone well; to wish someone ill.
4. to bid, as in greeting or leave-taking: to wish someone a good morning.
5. to request or charge: I wish him to come.

*-verb (used without object)*

6. to desire; long; yearn (often fol. by for): Mother says I may go if I wish. I wished for a book.
7. to make a wish: She wished more than she worked.

*-noun*

8. an act or instance of wishing.
9. a request or command: I was never forgiven for disregarding my father's wishes.
10. an expression of a wish, often one of a kindly or courteous nature: to send one's best wishes.
11. something wished or desired: He got his wish—a new car.

I don't see any definition here which includes in it the idea that whatever is wished for will not be attained. In fact, the first definition equates wishing with wanting and desiring. And the bible models the Christian god wanting and desiring in many instances. But, more on this below.

For now I think it is noteworthy to point out that Paul apparently disagrees with Cornelius Van Til. For Van Til clearly assumed that the Christian god can wish:

... it was God's will that sin should come into the world. He *wished* to enhance his glory by means of its punishment and removal. (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 160; emphasis added)

Again, Paul thinks that he can say that his god does not wish, because Paul determines what his god is and is not, what his god can and cannot do. The reason why Christians have so many internal disagreements is because one Christian will imagine his god one way, while another Christian imagines his god another way, and never shall the two meet. Here's an instance where the way Paul imagines his god is at variance with the way Van Til imagined his god.

Now for some bible quotes. Note how many times the bible portrays its god *wishing*:

**Psalms 115:3:** "Our God is in the heavens, and he does as he wishes."

**Proverbs 21:1:** "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes."

**Isaiah 46:9-10:** "Remember the things I have done in the past. For I alone am God! I am God, and there is none like me. Only I can tell you the future before it even happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish."

**Daniel 4:17:** "This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers, And the decision is a command of the holy ones, In order that the living may know, That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, And bestows it on whom He wishes And sets over it the lowliest of men."

**Daniel 4:25:** "that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes."

**Malachi 1:10:** "How I wish one of you would shut the Temple doors so that these worthless sacrifices could not be offered! I am not pleased with you', says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, 'and I will not accept your offerings'."



According to one gospel, Peter thought that Jesus could wish:

**Matthew 17:4-5:** “Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

According to another gospel, Jesus wished:

**Luke 12:49:** “I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!”

**Luke 19:42:** “He said, ‘I wish you knew today what things would give you peace! But now you do not see what they are’.”

And according to yet another gospel, Jesus affirmed that his god wishes:

**John 5:21:** “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.”

Additionally, the apostle Paul thought his god could wish:

**Romans 1:10:** “I ask God that in some way now I may be able to visit you, if he wishes me to do it.”

**I Corinthians 15:38:** “But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.”

**Ephesians 1:1:** “I am Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ. It was God's wish for me to be his messenger. I send greetings to God's people in the city of Ephesus, to those who believe in Christ Jesus.”

So according to the bible, which I always thought spoke for Christianity, the Christian god is in fact supposed to wish. Perhaps the way the authors of the bible imagined their god differs with the way Paul imagines his god on this point.

Paul then says that:

Creation ex nihilo has never been understood by any atheologist as “wishing.”

Really? How does Paul know this? He does not say. I guess we're all supposed to bow our heads and nod in silence.

Paul seems to confuse me with a believer:

Dawson's claiming that: “a being able to do all His holy will, including doing anything with what He's created” created the world out of nothing.

This is wrong: I never claimed that anything “created the world out of nothing.”

### The Scourge of Objectivism

Paul then tried to launch an attack against Objectivism. He wrote:

Objectivism has three axioms which they think are unique to Objectivism and unique to Dawson's own worldview and also devastating to Christian theism. They are: the axioms of (1) existence, (2) identity, and (3) consciousness.

Does Paul know of any other philosophies which name these facts explicitly as their axioms in the manner that Objectivism does? Paul sometimes tries to claim that these axioms are not unique to Objectivism, though I've not seen him identify any other philosophy which affirms them as Objectivism does. And if Paul could produce another philosophy which happened to agree with Objectivism's axioms, would it follow from this that either the axioms or Objectivism as a whole is false? Of course not.

Paul reveals his level of understanding when he gives his flash-card summary of Objectivism:

Real fast and in order, (1) is also called by the famous phrase “existence exists” (when you ask Objectivists what “existence exists” means they'll tell you it means “things exist”). (2) Simply states that an entity is itself and not another thing (A is A). (3) States that (a) consciousness does not have primacy over existence (something must exist in order for you to be conscious, a consciousness with nothing to be conscious of is, according to Rand, a

contradiction in terms) and (b) consciousness is axiomatic because you'd have to be conscious to deny that you were conscious.

This is pretty close, though much more can be said. For instance, the implication of all three axioms is that existence exists independent of consciousness, that consciousness did not create reality, that the task of consciousness is to perceive and identify what exists, not create and alter what exists at will. Paul makes use of these truths whenever he shoves a donut in his mouth, drives his car, makes love to his wife, or sets down to write another scathing post against Dawson Bethrick. But when he's confronted with these truths in the context of an apologetic debate, that's when he begins to buck.

Paul then wrote:

It's dubious how these can be used as an argument against theism, though. For example, how does the fact that "things exist" even remotely count as an argument against theism?

What about (1), (2) and (3) did Paul not understand? The axiom 'existence exists' is a starting point. If we begin with the fact that existence exists, then there's no need to posit something that created existence. We all have to start somewhere. What is your starting point? This question may be difficult to answer if one is reluctant to let go of sacred cow assumptions and beliefs that he's in the habit of accepting as true on faith. But if we cut past all those assumptions, uprooting them from below the surface where they were accepted uncritically, digging down to the very bedrock of our cognition, what do we find? Some Christians of course are going to say "God." But to what does this word refer? What does it mean? If he says it refers to "the creator of the universe," then already we can see he's not dug deep enough. For the notion "creator of the universe" is not conceptually irreducible; it clings to too many prior assumptions to be a genuine starting point. For one, it assumes the truth of Objectivism's starting points: to assert the existence of a "creator of the universe," something would have to exist (there's (1)), he would have to mean "creator" as opposed to something other than a creator (there's (2)), and he'd have to be conscious in order to make such a claim in the first place (there's (3)). Also we can ask: by what means do you have awareness of this thing you call "God"? If he says he inferred its existence from prior premises, then he's explicitly admitting that there are more fundamental assumptions lurking around that need to be identified and examined. That would discount "God" as his starting point. If he claims to have awareness of his god by looking inward, well, "inward" as opposed to what? "Outward"? Well, how did he make this distinction if he did not look outwardly first? If he thinks he looked inwardly first, how did he come to distinguish the inner from the outer? How does he distinguish what he calls "God" from what he is merely imagining? Again, Christians are out of luck on all these points on account of the stolen concepts they've accepted at the most fundamental level of cognition.

It is important to notice how the theist's would-be starting point assumes the truth of mine. In other words, my starting point would have to be true in order for the theist to assert his. I explained this [here](#). The believer in Wod says that his invisible magic being exists, and I say existence exists. Where did the Wod-believer get the concept 'exists'? He is borrowing from my worldview. Bugs ya, don't it?

If we begin with the fact of existence, then it should be obvious that it is nonsensical to ask for an explanation of existence. There goes the cosmological argument. For details, see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

Paul asks:

And, how is this at all unique to Bethrick's position?

Well, for one, Objectivism makes the recognition of these facts, and the conceptual hierarchy which they imply, explicit from the very beginning. Also, Objectivism remains consistent to these facts throughout its various branches. Where does Christianity explicitly affirm the axiom 'existence exists'? It is unique to Objectivism because Objectivism is unique in affirming it explicitly as its conceptually irreducible starting point.

Paul writes:

Christianity teaches that God exists and has existed eternally.

And just to entertain such a teaching, the Objectivist axioms would have to be true: something would have to exist, that something would have to be itself as opposed to something other than itself, and you would have to be conscious in order to have awareness of such teachings.

Paul writes:

Christianity begins with the creation account.

Which, as I indicated above, takes for granted numerous prior assumptions that Christian teachings leave unexpressed and unexplained. Try this: start with the fact that existence exists independent of any consciousness, and build an argument which remains consistent with this fact but seeks to conclude that a conscious being created existence. The Christian may say: "But we say God exists." So he agrees that existence does not require an agent to "account for" it. Boom, you're done: the Christian's god is out of a job. It's no longer needed as an explanation of what exists.

Paul writes:

One could say that one of the things you come away with no matter what from reading Genesis 1-2 is that "things exist!"

For one, no one needed to read Genesis in order to recognize the fact that things exist. Genesis is completely irrelevant. Also, it's not what "you come away with no matter what from reading Genesis 1-2," it's *what had to be true in order for it to be written and read in the first place*. What had to be true in order for the Genesis story to be written? The Objectivist axioms did.

Paul writes:

The Objectivist makes a mountain out of molehill with this one.

How so? Objectivism is simply making the rational thinker's conceptually irreducible starting point explicit. How is that "mak[ing] a mountain out of a molehill"? Does Paul have any sustainable objection to make against Objectivism? So far he's shooting blanks.

Paul writes:

So, my contention is that one cannot possibly mount a successful atheological argument from the axiomatic claim that 'things exist'.

Well, woop-di-doo. Paul's "contention" assumes much more than he lets on, and his understanding is selectively permeable. Remember earlier in this blog I asked you, my readers, to keep in mind Paul's charge that I committed the fallacy of slanting. That fallacy was defined as:

Deliberately omitting, de-emphasizing, or overemphasizing certain points to the exclusion of others in order to hide evidence that is important and relevant to the conclusion of the argument and that should be taken into account of in an argument.

It seems Paul is doing just this throughout his "devastating critique" of Objectivism. He deliberately ignores the crucial role that my atheology gives to the issue of metaphysical primacy, omits identifying any objective means by which he might have awareness of what he calls "God," ignores the fact that statements like "God exists and has existed eternally" and teachings such as "the creation account" draw on abundant prior assumptions that are needed to prop up such beliefs. He ignores the fact that Objectivism's axioms would need to be true in order for him to claim that Christianity is true in the first place. All this deception is integral to the way Paul frames the issues here.

Alright, let's review Paul's contention. Does he begin by identifying a starting point that does not assume the truth of mine? No, he begins by mischaracterizing the Objectivist axiom 'existence exists', which he shouldn't need to do if he were so confident in his contention:

To the extent that an argument can be made, "existence exists" will not be axiomatic anymore and hence subject to all the epistemological missiles who choose to launch at it.

How will making an argument cause "existence exists" to no longer be axiomatic? What argument do you have in mind? What "epistemological missiles" could have any meaning if the axiom 'existence exists' were not true? The axioms are invulnerable; they have to be true for anyone to launch any "epistemological missiles" in the first place. And if they direct those missiles at the axioms, they're simply shooting themselves in the foot. Hardly a surefire method of attacking Objectivism.

So far it seems Paul is the one who's making a mountain out of a molehill here.

Paul writes:

So the objectivist has two options: (a) keep his axiom and lose his critique against Christianity or (b) lose his axiom and be forced to defend a position not unlike this one: “existence exists means that only indestructible hard bits of matter exist and even an omnipotent God cannot affect them.”

I was hoping that Paul would explain how assembling an argument (any argument?) would cause 'existence exists' to lose its axiomatic status. Instead, he does a drive-by on this and assumes that's sufficient, then lists two alternatives (as is so common with religious apologists: they love to back people in between an imaginary rock and a fictitious hard place) from which we're supposed to make some difficult choices. The question is: Why are Paul's (a) and (b) our only two options? Why do Christians so habitually suppress the rational alternative? Namely: Begin with the fact that existence exists, recognize that it exists independent of consciousness, and move on from there. What's wrong with that? Paul doesn't like it because it does not allow room for his invisible magic being. No wonder he's in the business of making mountains out of molehills; he wants to practice using his faith to cast them into the sea!

Paul writes:

When the objectivist makes this move ((b)) it won't be too hard to slice and dice him.

Paul needs to take his plan back to the drawing board, because chances are, most Objectivists are simply not going to accept his characterization of matter, and thus will simply scoff at his proposed dichotomies. They are like cardboard cut-outs of out-of-work actors in an auto parts store, tenuously held up by Elmer's and popsicle sticks.

Paul continues:

I'll address (3) briefly since (2) concerns us with the post by Bethrick that I'm replying to. So, regarding consciousness: (i) Dawson's a materialist and so I don't think he can account for consciousness.

Where does Paul get the idea that I am a materialist? Does Paul not realize that one need not be a materialist in order to reject belief in invisible magic beings? [I've pointed out to Paul before](#) what [apologist Greg Welty](#) has said on this point:

materialism is not 'the consistent testimony of the modern atheist.' Many atheists believe that something more than concrete, material objects exist, and present plenty of arguments for that view. Acting as if they're all materialists makes us look, well, a bit outdated. Sort of like never progressing beyond Hume in our understanding of 'the inductive problem'. ([Re: On b\) and possibly not-a\)](#)

What is Paul's primary objection to materialism? Is it not its incompatibility with the fact that we are conscious? Consciousness is often thought to be something other than material in nature, so a view which stipulates that matter and only matter exists (and that nothing that is not matter does not exist) seems to pose a problem with this fact. Paul can put his missile-launcher down, for Objectivism explicitly affirms the fact that we are conscious. If Paul still thinks there's a problem here, he's welcome to produce a statement from the Objectivist corpus which stipulates that only matter exists and that consciousness does not exist. How long should we wait for him to produce such a quote?

Meanwhile, what exactly does Paul mean by “account for consciousness”? I simply recognize that consciousness is real. Why do I need to “account for” it? What am I supposed to say at this point? [“Duh, I donno, must be God did it!”](#)? How does Paul know that I have no “account for” consciousness?

Since he brings up the issue, we must ask: what according to Paul qualifies as a satisfactory “account for” consciousness? Does he think that an appeal to his god will satisfactorily “account for” consciousness? How so? If Paul thinks his god is conscious, then he's simply pointing to what needs to be “accounted for” in the first place. So theism offers no progress whatsoever on this point. It's worse than vicious circularity; it's go-nowhere-quickly-itis.

Paul writes:

That is, if Dawson's Objectivism (I say Dawson's since I don't know if materialism is necessitated by Objectivism) is correct, then we're not conscious in any interesting way.

Is this supposed to be an argument? For or against what? Precisely what does Paul mean by “conscious in any interesting way”? And why doesn't he explain this? To be conscious in any *particular* way (for instance, “in any interesting way”), one would have to have the capacity of consciousness in the first place. Paul is simply telling us about himself here: he's so prone to taking consciousness for granted that explicitly recognizing it seems degrading somehow. But it's still a fact that consciousness is real, and it's still a fact that one would have to be conscious in order to deny his own or anyone else's consciousness. So the Objectivist axiom of consciousness prevails, while Paul is caught once again reaching for a

non-argument. And yet at the same time, he quibbles with consciousness because it's not sufficiently interesting to him (notice the subjectivity here). Paul's concern is misplaced because he's missed the point of the axioms. The axioms are the answer to the question: if we cleared the deck of all our knowledge and the assumptions they take from granted, what would be our first recognitions, our first discoveries, indeed our very first concepts? It seems dubious that someone who refers to himself as a "presuppositionalist" and thus implies that his concern is for what assumptions we take for granted, would find such inquiries uninteresting. But then again, I do not find that presuppositionalists are genuinely interested in human welfare anyway.

Paul wrote:

Indeed, beliefs, thoughts, and intentionality cannot be had on Dawson's materialism.

Can Paul site one statement that I have made that pins me as a materialist? No, he cannot, for I have not affirmed materialism. And even if I did, would that be any better for him? Many materialists have affirmed the reality of consciousness. On Paul's view, we need to imagine a supernatural consciousness before we can claim to be conscious. But imagining anything requires consciousness. So again, Paul demonstrates his inclination to offer stolen concepts instead of insights worthy of genuine consideration.

Isn't it interesting how Paul continually needs to deliberately misrepresent my position in order to pretend that he's critiquing it?

Paul wrote:

(ii) At best the axiom let's us say that we are conscious, not any one else.

The axiom is a basic recognition. Why would its ability to "let us say that we are conscious" be problematic? Again, where is Paul's argument? What exactly is he trying to argue? That the axioms are not true? We've settled that already: they would have to be true in order for us to try to conclude that they're not true. Is he trying to say that they are not unique to Objectivism? Well, that failed when Paul failed to produce another philosophy which affirms them explicitly as its fundamental starting points. All Paul could do was demonstrate how Christianity assumes the truth of the Objectivist axioms, but [I've already pointed this out before!](#) Is he trying to argue that the axioms aren't "interesting"? Well, even if he could draw such a subjective conclusion, what would it prove? The axioms would still have to be true in order to assemble such an argument. Is he trying to argue that the Objectivist is incapable of putting together an argument against theism? Well, he hasn't proven this. I've seen many Objectivist assemble arguments against theism, many of them pointing to the [metaphysical subjectivism inherent in theism](#) as its own defeater.

Then Paul pops off with statements like this:

That is, Objectivism doesn't escape the ego-centric predicament.

Similar efforts to criticize Objectivism have been tried before. For instance, see [here](#). Such criticism is typically borne on a very poor understanding of Objectivism. Paul gives no indication that his is an exception to this.

Paul writes:

(iii) Dawson has made this claim: "Propositions are functions of a consciousness." And so the problem here is what to do with necessary propositions? Granting Dawson's claim that propositions are functions of consciousness, it would appear that he'd need to have a necessary consciousness that exists in all possible worlds.

Wrong. For one, I reject the necessary-contingent dichotomy that the conception rooting Paul's alleged problem takes for granted. Also, the concern here should be for *truth*, not some vague notion called "necessary propositions" which could mean anything and nothing. Furthermore, I do not take the "possible worlds" notion as a standard for testing claims for their truth value. "Possible worlds" is another name for "imaginary worlds." Why would an *imaginary* world serve as a standard for determining what is true in the *actual* world? If we are able to identify certain facts which remain constant (again, we have the axioms; for instance, the fact that existence exists does not change), then we have the stability of an objective reference that subsequent truth recognitions require. This is where a good understanding of the objective theory of concepts becomes vital (and no, I did not learn about concepts by reading the bible). Meanwhile, if Paul thinks I am wrong for affirming that propositions are a function of consciousness, then it seems that he is quite at odds with his own worldview here: does he think that the "necessary truths" he has in mind do not require any consciousness? Are they free-floating ideas that exist independent of his god's consciousness, that they needed to be discovered by his god as well as anyone else who needs them (since they're "necessary")? Again, we just have more blank-outs from the Master Manata himself.

Paul writes:

Though I'd not use the term "function," it appears that Dawson's stating Theistic Conceptual Realism!

In his perfidious ignorance of the matters in which Paul wants to feign knowledge, things have a way of appearing just how he wants to see them. It should be obvious that I'm not "stating Theistic Conceptual Realism" for a) I am not asserting the existence of an invisible magic being (that rules out theism), b) my statement in no way requires the existence of an invisible magic being (that rules out Christian presuppositionalism), and c) it is unclear to me what theory of concepts Paul's theism could possibly be (for I've not found a theory of concepts provided anywhere in the bible; it does not even contain the word 'concept'!). Meanwhile, I have a theory of concepts, and it does not need Paul's or anyone else's gods.

Paul continued:

And (iv), it's hard to see how "consciousness" could be used as an argument against theism unless it has non-axiomatic meaning poured into it. At this point it loses its privileged protection as an "axiom" and is subject to critique.

What makes things hard for Paul to see is his reluctance to admit to himself that he doesn't know what he's talking about. What does Paul mean by using consciousness "as an argument against theism"? He makes it sound like he's interacting with an argument that proceeded as follows:

Premise: Consciousness.

Conclusion: Therefore, theism is false.

I don't know of anyone who has presented an argument that takes this form. At most, it looks quite incomplete. Might it be that Paul is deliberately suppressing the premises of arguments that have actually been presented?

This again only tells us about Paul Manata, namely his impoverished level of understanding for my position. I have nowhere presented as "an argument against theism" anything such as this:

Premise: If consciousness is real, then theism is false.

Premise: Consciousness is real.

Conclusion: Therefore, theism is false.

So not only does Paul demonstrate that he does not know what arguments I have presented (even though I have a blog and personal website full of my writings), he also demonstrates that he has no refutation for the arguments that I have presented.

Also, Paul does not explain how the concept 'consciousness' loses its status as an axiomatic concept. I submit that he does not know what he's talking about.

Meanwhile, I've asked Paul before, and I'll ask him again: Can he produce any objective evidence for the existence of a consciousness which possesses the powers which Christianity claims for its god? Mere stories about such things do not count, because stories can be written any way their writers want to write them, and what we need is something that can be confidently said not to be the product of someone's imagination. We're waiting, Paul.

Paul writes:

Now, (2). Bethrick uses the idea of "reversing identity" to support his "invisible magic being" pejorative which, as we saw, may be warranted (even though it's not given my analysis) but it's still a pejorative. Why is turning water into wine a problem? Well, because A is A. Water is water. But we can gladly agree that A is A. Wine is wine. How does it follow that "a being able to do all His holy will, including doing anything with what He's created" can't turn water into wine. Water is still water. Wine is still wine. Jesus' miracle at Cana didn't mean that water was wine, it means that wine is wine.

Such a being can do anything its believers want it to do, *in the confines of their imaginations*. The problem for the theist is that he is unable to provide us with any objective means by which we can distinguish what he claims from what he (or his forebears) may have merely been imagining. But let's get something straight here. Water is water, not wine. Right? In other words, A is A, *not non-A*. Good, now let's move on. According to the Christian mythology, there exists a supernatural conscious being which can turn A (water) into non-A (wine), *just by willing it*. Right? Christianity's

invisible magic being "God" can sit there on its throne in the imaginary realm called "heaven," look down on pitiful, puny little earth and say "I command the water in thy waterpots to become wine!" and presto, poof, zap, abra-cadabra, that water suddenly turns into wine, just like magic! Now if something like this happens in a Harry Potter book, we would call it magic. If it happens in Tolkein's tales of middle earth, we would call it magic. What we have here is not equivocation on my part, but special pleading on the Christian's part: he wants to be able to assert garbage in place of philosophy, but resents it when we point out that it stinks like other garbage.

The Christian view is that a consciousness created and rules the universe of objects. And Paul carries on as if he were concerned about what may be philosophically problematic with such a view. The view in question is called subjectivism. It is the view that the subject in the subject-object relationship holds primacy over its objects. So he's putting on as if he were concerned about what may be philosophically problematic with subjectivism.

The Christian asserts the Christian worldview as a truth. But on what basis does he do this? Does he assert Christianity as truth on the basis that the subject has the power to stipulate what is true and what is real? If so, then he's implicitly assuming that any consciousness could come and make a liar of him at any time just by stipulating that something else is true instead. Does he assert Christianity as truth on the basis that the subject does not have the power to stipulate what is true and what is real, but instead must *discover* and *identify* what is true on the basis of objects which do not conform to intentions? If so, then he needs to review the worldview that he is claiming to be true, for he has performatively contradicted it by calling it true.

Paul writes:

Apparently, it looks as if the Objectivist's argument is that nothing could turn something into another thing, lest it defy the law of identity.

Notice that Paul does not present the argument in question, so readers will have no idea whether he's correct or not on this. What is he afraid of? Why doesn't he produce the argument that he's seen and show where it hold "that nothing could turn something into another thing"? Objectivism does not deny causality. But Paul is deliberately suppressing this fact. According to Objectivism, causality is the law of identity applied to action. Change is the identity of an action, and Objectivism recognizes that entities act according to their nature. Paul's readers will not learn this from what he presents.

So when he says that "the law of identity doesn't tell us that... nothing could turn something into another thing," he's implying that Objectivism affirms this to be what the law of identity does tell us. Does Paul give any quotations to support his characterization? No, he doesn't. Does he not know what Objectivism teaches? If he doesn't, then how can he launch effective missiles against Objectivism? It is deception like this which prompted John Loftus, for instance, [to exclaim that](#) "Paul Manata is a deceiver." The problem is that Paul doesn't care if he needs to stoop to deceptive measures. The goal of protecting his god-belief must be achieved at all costs. It has cost him not only his credibility, but also his adult mind.

If Paul has succeeded in anything, it is in encouraging me to continue referring to his god as an invisible magic being. Now watch Paul try to argue that calling the bible a "storybook" is pejorative. What would we do without him?

by Dawson Bethrick

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [10:00 PM](#)

### 3 Comments:

[Brother Blark](#) said...

You'd better be careful, Dawson. God has been known to use his tools, like Paul, to swoop in like an invisible jet and bash infidels back into the bronze age, where people wrote His book.

Or something like that.

Heh...I just called Paul "God's Tool."

In all seriousness, you can't account for anything, so you are reduced to foolishness. Its like a kid sitting on Uncle Jim's

lap, and slapping him while arguing TAG.

Or something like that.

You are doomed.

[October 29, 2006 1:55 PM](#)

[Paul Manata](#) said...

hey Dawson,

You wrote in the comments section of your Frame post,

"I don't know what "immaterial" means. All I know is what it doesn't mean. As I have stated before, I do not know how I would go about proving that the mind is not composed of a material that we do not yet understand."

What did you mean by that? You say you're not a materialist. So, do you believe that there are things which exist which are not material? If you think that everything that exists is material, then how are you not a materialist? If you do believe that "invisible" things exist, then how do you square that with what you wrote?

Just some clarifications before I respond.

thanks,

PM

[October 29, 2006 3:47 PM](#)

[Paul Manata](#) said...

Dawson,

While you're at it, since you believe that the mind is not material (but in other places you seem to imply that it is) then can you tell me how immaterial things can cause material things? I'd be interested in your thoughts on this and how you'd refute the arguments of Dennet et al.

thanks,

PM

[October 30, 2006 7:33 AM](#)