

Dear Dave,

You're probably right that it's pointless to debate these topics when the underpinnings of individual arguments have already been enshrined as resolute facts. You did say you no longer saw any utility in trying to convince non-converts of your views, so you may find the following paragraphs tedious muck to wade through. I'll understand if this correspondence doesn't appeal to you, but I am (personally) interested in your responses to the ideas below, so if this is at all worthwhile for you I'd be interested in hearing what you have to say. (Please find enclosed commentary on *Cerebus* #291, extracted into another letter for ease of use.)

One now imagines the onset of a physical comedy starring two pairs of hands, each switching between writing or typing and the equally imperative task of plugging its corresponding set of ears, attempting to block out incoming sound. (One realizes written correspondence doesn't actually *produce* sound, but blast these confounded analogies and we'll try to enjoy the show from here on out...)

Yes, I think "self-evident" is a linguistic construct that only works when a context has been firmly acknowledged. I don't think *anything* can be "self-evident" outside the clearly defined parameters of whatever language is employed. I don't understand how something can be known if it can't be articulated. The two concepts are inextricable. If we somehow manage to ignore that knowledge *is* language, we find ourselves positioned on a landscape that is easily manipulated by stimuli that appeals to our base instincts rather than our rational intellects – and with no vocabulary, how would we make sense of what was happening to us? If we instead accept the premise that knowledge implies articulation, what we're left with is that our dictionary bounds and defines our arguments. That is the inevitable price of adhering to a common language -- but it also unfastens cathedral-sized tent flaps on the idea that how we say something doesn't change its Truth. The proverbial screendoor on our submarine. Morass.

There are attempts to transcend this. The kind of word games and oscillating "on the other hand"s you mention are a species of the same animal: perceiving; and regurgitating those perceptions with imperfect fidelity. I don't believe muddy thinking and/or imprecise articulation are always (or even perhaps predominantly) evidence of "bad faith." The fact that misuse of the speaker's language occurs internally as well as externally (and unintentionally as well as intentionally) can affect an overwhelming pull on otherwise rationally sound conclusions. Sometimes the initial thought processes that lead to these conclusions are influenced by the language chosen even before they are pronounced to others. Our assertions, while feeling "right," maintain some localized coherence but never reach escape velocity. Arguing by analogy, for instance, often mesmerizes us with poetry, but just as regularly fails to clarify our understanding of the subject matter at hand. These are insurmountable failings of communication. Language is imprecise. Perception is imprecise. *We* are imprecise.

I *did* zoom in on a single footnote from #289/290 (though later in the fine print you refer back to it at least in allusion, so allow some credit for ferreting out a relevant nit to pick). Blame deficiency of human dexterity; intentional brevity in deference to my other points -- but there is certainly more to talk about here if you like. The fact that I singled out one inconsistency in no way demonstrates that Fomalont and Kopeikin have conclusively proven the speed of G. Does not the nullification of a fact you use to argue your point subtract the same value as it would have added when it was assumed correct? In any

case, though granted my expertise in physics is, shall we say, limited, I don't understand that finite gravitational velocity invalidates the P- and/or M- brane models -- I don't think either is exclusively predicated upon the speed of gravity itself. These topics are still debated amongst actual mathematicians and physicists (see the article I enclosed last time); it may be that we're not even equipped here to arrive at positive conclusions even where we *do* assume our information is accurate. When I first read this section in the footnotes, I immediately thought of the *From Hell* dialog, and assumed you were attempting to refute Alan Moore's description of the universe-that-can-be-viewed-from-any-angle-with-no-bias-towards-the-direction-of -time's-arrow. After seeing your piece in Smoky Man's *Alan Moore: Portrait of an Extraordinary Gentleman*, this indeed seems to be the major trajectory of attack. You didn't have a strong counter when Alan put his formulation to you in 1997 (or at least, it didn't make it into the dialog as published), but this facet of #289/290 seems to be a considered attempt at constructing a response. Is it even necessary for a divide to emerge here though? If the mathematics (and indeed, the mathematical approach) that forms the basis of the brane models is flawed, why try to use the same methodology to refute itself? Relativity and its model of Space/Time are also mathematical constructs, and as such cede no ground to arguments with non-mathematical foundations.

I don't agree that this is merely arguing for the sake of arguing.

These points are central to the grammar of the stories we tell, and as such exert a non-trivial influence over the shapes of our conclusions.

It's an interesting case you build. As for myself, I grew up in a relatively small Midwestern American town in the late 1970s and 1980s (population approaching 3,000). Rather than being submerged in the predominantly science-based, atheistic intellectual community you seem to postulate for "most people," I was instead surrounded by devout Baptist, Methodist and Pentecostal liturgies. My experience is hardly atypical for the majority of America's population (residing, as they do, in the Midwestern states). Surrounded? Compressed. There was no prevailing wind dragging me away from the church. Rather, my early education was grounded in demonstrable divisions between ostensibly identical faiths. Don't think this discouraged my enthusiasm -- it was fascinating. I've studied the Scripture (in my case, the KJV and NIV Bibles) since I could read. It may have been necessary to parse belief in the divinity of objects such as the Shroud of Turin and the supposed infallibility of typographical errors which are inconsistent between copies of the original 1611 KJV as a consequence of maintaining interest in the material, but I found that my cognizance of contradictions expressed through the religion didn't quite transcend the enormous gravity of the local culture. The weight of tradition invalidated "alternative readings" of long-accepted interpretations (a phenomenon you seem to be becoming familiar with). It was made clear to me on numerous occasions that it was not my place to question custom -- the acknowledged veracity of many of my observations to the contrary. This was not a condition that subsided upon my reaching the age of majority. However, my faith that the One God existed was never something that I questioned seriously, in spite of my not being able to articulate the origins of that faith to myself -- it simply never became an issue for me until much later. The cultural vacuum was complete. God simply... was. One sees your conversion to Belief as a sort of reverse-mirror image. I have to believe, myself, that your conscience guides your choices about what you put faith in. My own observations and decisions are similarly based upon an earnest attempt to correctly perceive and reasonably

react to the world around me. For myself, rejecting the conclusions I ultimately arrive at on a basis of fear or aesthetic objections *is* morally repugnant. That the utter lack of substantiating evidence for the existence of (any) God is seemingly absolute when God(s) are postulated as independent intelligences which exist *within* "Space/Time" (or whatever model of the physical universe we choose to focus on -- God must exist within the universe to be perceived) would tend to establish that these entities may in fact be confined to our minds -- and therefore be correctly regarded as creatures or creations of language. *You* stipulate that God has no obligation to prove to me that he exists -- and *I* maintain that, failing a physical-world manifestation, a God which is solely experienced through language cannot be conceived of as other than a hypothetical construct.

In any case, I think that one benefit of such an openly fictional religiosity is to drain this lake, teeming as it is with competing, comprehensive worldviews, into a jar that simultaneously *contains* the elaborate latticeworks of language while still managing to retain that transparent clarity which is essential to our attempts to rationally evaluate ourselves. We have to keep in mind exactly what it is we've undertaken. We are indeed relinquishing the bigger picture to examine something considerably finer grained -- and in doing so, we deliberately sacrifice what slivers of Overview we've already achieved. Everyone makes this choice about which "level" they want to settle themselves onto. When Alan Moore nails down his conceptions of Deity and zooms all the way in on that 1st Century serpent-God Glycon, is he violating the sanctity of ultimate Truth, or merely admitting that regardless of what is said to him, he still has to hear it with his own ears (nerves; brain)? In this view, the physical-world existence of the God is (rightly, I think, in light of the total lack of empirical evidence to the contrary) construed as completely irrelevant. In your case, the filing cabinet has been designed according to a blueprint divined through your reading (and your specific translations) of the Torah, the Testament, and the Koran. Your vernacular; your choice. You assert all this as self-evident -- but your conclusions about the nature of God may not be universal Truth in the sense that you seem to have accepted them. I couldn't agree more with the closing paragraphs of your letter concerning the cumulative futility of acquiring knowledge when it comes to transmuting that information into any certainty whatsoever about the ultimate nature of reality. Imprecision, like death and taxes, simply seems to be the cost of doing business. At least we can draw our picture stories and just consign all this "search for knowledge" nonsense to the scrapheap of youthful naivete though, right?

Your recent observations (in your letter to me and elsewhere) on Free Will and its place with regards to recognition by human governments are refreshing.

I appreciate your having taken time to write me back, and I'm looking forward to #291.

Ray Earles