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The "God's Good Pleasure" Principle and the Cartoon Universe Premise

The more I examine the nature of Christianity and the statements of those who seek to defend it, the more appropriate and fitting I find the cartoon universe analogy that I wrote about in my [March 30 blog](#). When a cartoon illustrator draws his scenes, he is in a sense playing the part of a god: he determines which characters will be cast in his cartoon; he determines what they say and what they do; he determines the setting in which they interact; he determines all outcomes that will transpire in the story he paints. He can make gravity reverse itself, he can make water turn into ice instantly, he can make human beings fly through the air like birds or even soar like jet airplanes, or make them breathe water, sustain injuries which would kill a real human being instantly, only to get up and continue on as if nothing happened. He can do whatever he pleases. Anything that constrains him is external to the cartoon itself, such as his ability as an illustrator, his need for sleep, his lack of time or materials, his contract with his employer, etc.

In regard to its implications as an analogue to the theistic view of the universe, this aspect of the cartoon universe premise of theism raises a topical question: Is the supreme being that Christians praise and worship constrained, as man is, by any facts over which it has no control? Or, is this supreme being free to pursue whatever whim might catch his fancy?

Psalm 115:3 answers this question:

"But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."

The notion that a consciousness which allegedly has no physical body can experience pleasure, is certainly bizarre. But it appears that the author of this verse, and those who believe it, take it for granted that such a notion is somehow sensible, and are willing to ignore the nature of pleasure as we know it in order to affirm such strange ideas.

Regardless, an analysis of the metaphysics behind the Christian god's capacity for pleasure while having no body was not what the author of this verse was trying to provide. In fact, I would find it rather dubious to suppose its author were even capable of such an analysis. Rather, the author's point was that there is an invisible magic being whose will holds metaphysical primacy over everything else, and that its *pleasure* is its one and only guide to action. That is, according to this view, reality is subject to the Christian god's *whim*.

Christians often protest this obvious recognition, insisting that their god is neither arbitrary nor capricious, that its choices and actions are "rational." (I kid you not, many have in fact claimed this.) But given their descriptions of their god, such a position is untenable. For one's choices and actions to be evaluated as *rational* in nature, they would have to be made on the basis of objective facts which define an actor's goals. Rational action is at minimum action that is goal-oriented, whose goal is objective in nature (i.e., based on relevant facts). The Christian god, however, if it existed, would lack any such objective reference point (everything other than itself was allegedly created by it to begin with), and it could have no goals whatsoever (since goal-orientedness presupposes personal needs which the supposed being that Christians describe could not have - it is said to be perfect and lacking nothing already). Thus when the apologist makes the claim that his god is "rational," he commits the fallacy of the stolen concept - i.e., making use of a concept while denying its genetic roots.

Notice how the Christian worldview and the statements of its defenders imply the cartoon universe premise. Take the words of Greg Bahnsen for instance. On pages 225-226 of his book *Always Ready*, he writes the following:

According to Scripture's account, God is the transcendent and almighty Creator of heaven and earth. Everything owes its very existence and character to His creative power and definition (Gen. 1; Neh. 9:6; Col. 1:16-17). He makes things the way they are and determines that they function as they do. "His understanding is infinite" (Ps. 147:5). Moreover, God sovereignly governs every event that transpires, determining what, when, where, and how anything takes place - from the movement of the planets to the decrees of kings to the very hairs on our heads (Eph. 1:11). According to the Bible, He is omnipotent and in total control of the universe. Isaiah 40 celebrates in famous phraseology the creation, delineating, direction, providence, and power of Jehovah (vv. 12, 22-28). He has the freedom and control over the created order that the potter has over the clay (Rom. 9:21). As the Psalmist affirms, "Our God is in the heavens; He has done whatsoever He pleased" (Ps. 115:3)."

As if tailor-made as a proof-text validating my cartoon universe analogy, Bahnsen cites Romans 9:21, which reads:

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

Had the author of Romans lived today, he would surely have been more accurate to his worldview if he incorporated the cartoonist and his work into his metaphor, for a potter is far too limited to serve as a fitting analogue for the Christian's god. A potter, for instance, cannot make a pot that talks; but a cartoonist can make anything talk, such as talking rabbits (e.g., Bugs Bunny), talking ducks (e.g., Donald and Daffy), even talking cars (e.g., Speed Racer). Surely the author of Romans thought his god could make such things as the talking snake in the Garden of Eden and Balaam's talking ass. After all, in *Always Ready*, pp. 109-110, Bahnsen asks in regard to his god, "He could even make the stones cry out, couldn't He?" Apparently Bahnsen would have to think that his god could make stones cry out, for the book of Habakkuk is affirmed as "Scripture," and in reporting God's own pronouncements, Habakkuk 2:11 states: "For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it." A potter could not make ceramic vessels which sing; but a cartoonist can.

Similarly, a potter could not make a pot with superhuman strength; but a cartoonist can make anything with superhuman strength. A potter could not make a pot that can fly through the air on a broomstick; but a cartoonist can make anything fly on a broomstick. A potter could not make a pot that walks through walls; but a cartoonist could make the potter and all his siblings walk through walls. A potter could not make a pot that walks on water; but a cartoonist make anything walk or even dance on water. A potter could not make a pot that dies by means of crucifixion and three days later is resurrected; but a cartoonist make anything die from crucifixion and raise it up in a sequel.

So the paragraph quoted from Bahnsen's book above, should really look like this:

According to the law of identity, the Cartoonist and his art are the perfect real-life analogue to Christianity's notion of its god and the relationship Christians say it has to the universe. Everything in a cartoon owes its very shape and color to the Cartoonist's creative power and definition. The Cartoonist makes the images in his cartoons the way they are and determines the actions that they perform. Moreover, the Cartoonist sovereignly governs every event that transpires in his cartoons, determining what, when, where, and how anything takes place - from the movement of a pink panther to the decrees of a sarcastic rabbit to the very hairs on Porky Pig's chin. According to the law of causality, the Cartoonist is omnipotent and in total control of his cartoons. Disney's Animator's Yearbook celebrates in famous phraseology the creativity, delineating, direction, providence and power of the Cartoonist. He has the freedom and control over his cartoons that the potter has over the clay. As a pop singer might put it, "The Cartoonist is in the driver's seat; He has done whatsoever He pleased."

So contrary to what those sympathetic to Christianity might feel in reaction to my discovery, the cartoon universe analogy is far from an instance of gratuitous ridicule. In fact, it exquisitely captures the essence of what theism generally teaches in a simple analogy that exposes the hideous absurdity of theistic ideas.

by Dawson Bethrick

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