

## Hays on the Cartoon Universe Premise of Theism

Steve Hays of [Triablogue](#) apparently doesn't like it when I point out the cartoonish implications of Christianity's view of the universe. The problem for Steve is that he wants to fault me for these implications, when in fact I am not the author of the Christian worldview and its conception of the universe. Nor am I an adherent of the view that the universe conforms to an invisible magic being's wishes. Indeed, why would I embrace a worldview which likens the universe to a cartoon when I don't think the universe is at all analogous to a cartoon?

Steve [wrote](#):

Needless to say, Dawson is the one trying to smear the intelligence of Christians by alleging that we subscribe to a "cartoon" worldview. Since he chooses to use a childish analogy, I simply pointed out that a childish analogy would come naturally to someone who thinks like a child. It's his comparison, not mine. If he resents the fact that I measure him by his own yardstick, then he would be well-advised to buy another yardstick. Bethrick then pretends that he is simply offering an updated analogy which improves on St. Paul's potter/clay analogy, as if no insult were intended. This is a transparent exercise in rhetorical backpedaling. As if calling someone's worldview "cartoonish" is intended to be complimentary rather than demeaning. Dawson is welcome to his harlequinade, but I'm not going to pay the admission fee.

Steve's got it all wrong. It is not I who am doing the smearing here; Christians smear their own intelligence by their allegiance to a worldview which essentially likens the universe to a cartoon. Notice that Steve offers no argument against the analogy; all he does is express contempt for it, directing his resentment at me rather than soberly recognizing the accuracy of the analogy and its remarkable improvement over the one that Paul offers in Romans 9. He calls the analogy itself "childish," but this is simply an attempt to malign it for its accuracy while misplacing the blame. What is childish is Christianity, a worldview which elevates fantasy and make-believe above reason and rationality, ultimately because of its commitment to metaphysical subjectivism - the view that reality conforms to someone's intentions.

I marvel at Steve's capacity for ironic projection. Why would Christians be insulted by the cartoon universe analogy, when they themselves champion a worldview which views the universe in a manner that is directly analogous to a cartoon? Here Steve is simply grumbling because the pot has been called black, and provides no counter-argument to the analogy which I have developed. Contrary to what Steve is eager for his readers to believe, my analogy is not an exercise in merely "calling someone's worldview 'cartoonish'," nor is it "intended to be complimentary rather than demeaning," or vice versa. Its power is in its accuracy, while its effect is something that comes along for the ride. The Christian's resentment for the cartoon universe analogy is simply an expression of his desire to have his cake, and eat it, too. As a supernaturalist, he wants, on the one hand, to assert the existence of invisible magic beings which can create their objects out of nothing and manipulate them at will, informing his worldview with all kinds of bizarre and silly notions of miracles and miracle-workers; on the other hand, he wants the respectability of a serious worldview, even though only the self-loathing can take it seriously as a guide to one's choices and actions. (I've yet to meet a Christian who consistently governs his choices and actions as if the world of objects actually do conform to the conscious intentions of an invisible magic being; and the dishonesty required to affirm such a worldview while operating on opposite fundamental premises can only lead to self-loathing. As evidence, look at the cynicism and bitterness proudly displayed on [Triablogue](#).)

Steve says that "Dawson is welcome to his harlequinade, but I'm not going to pay the admission fee." But the harlequinade here is Christianity's own, not mine; and Steve, as a confessed believer and invested "defender of the faith," has not only paid his admission fee, he's also put all his chips on the horse with the broken leg. It won't do to fault me for these failings, as they are not mine. Steve is shooting the messenger while ignoring the content of the message.

The logic of the analogy is pretty difficult to miss, especially once it's been pointed out. The apostle Paul himself provided us with a precedent for drawing an analogy between the creator-deity of Christianity and its creations as he imagined the relationship between the two. To illustrate that relationship in concrete terms, he likened the creator-deity to a potter, and its creation to a lump of clay which it molds in conformity with its desires. The apostle draws this analogy in order to shield his god from critical questions, such as those having to do with its motivations. The apostle wants people to believe that his god created everything and gave all creatures their natures such as they are precisely what it wants them to be, but at the same time he does not want people to think that his god is morally

responsible for what it has allegedly created. Romans 9:18-22 gives us the apostle's rationale:

He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

Clearly the goal here is to put a stop to critical thinking. To convey his reasoning, Paul draws an analogy between a potter and the lump of clay he uses to produce a 'vessel', such as a bowl or other household item. Essentially, Paul is saying that his god is free to make a bowl with a big crack down its side, and then condemn that bowl for being useless for holding soup. (Yes, his deity is that big, folks.) Since the potter intended the bowl to be useless for holding soup in the first place (after all, it doesn't make mistakes), Paul is saying that the potter is right to condemn it, and that the bowl has no business asking the potter, "Why did you make me like this?" Of course, if the potter fashioned the bowl with a conceptual form of consciousness and moral inquisitiveness, he would be quite foolish to expect the bowl *not* to question his motives as a potter. Not having a good answer in such a case, the potter would simply resort to saying "It's my right to do thus!" and presume to have scored a victory. If it turns out that this is not sufficient to put an end to moral inquiries, the potter can threaten the bowl with eternal torment if it persists in asking such unanswerable questions.

Similarly, Elmer Fudd cannot say to his cartoonist, "Why do you always make me fail when I twy to shoot dat wabbit?" The reason is because Elmer Fudd is doing precisely what his cartoonist wants him to do, and he's not supposed to question the cartoonist's motivations. In fact, a cartoonist can guarantee that his cartoons will not ask him such questions by creating them with no consciousness of their own, and no moral inquisitiveness. They'd certainly be easier to control that way.

Also, that the cartoon universe analogy is an improvement over Paul's potter-clay analogy is readily apparent. A potter, for instance, cannot make a snake which speaks in a human language. But a cartoonist certainly can. A potter cannot make an ark and have select representatives of all the earth's animals show up for a ride. But a cartoonist can. A potter cannot make the Red Sea part on command, but a cartoonist can. A potter cannot make a dead man rise from the grave. But a cartoonist surely can. The cartoon universe analogy is thus careful to preserve the manipulative sovereignty that Christians claim for their god in the role of the cartoonist, and the conforming plasticity they attribute to the universe as a creation of the god they imagine to a far greater degree than Paul's potter-clay analogy could hope to, so much so that it accommodates the miracle stories they want to believe.

[Recently](#) Steve wrote that

every argument from analogy is also an argument from disanalogy since an analogy falls short of identity. So Dawson also needs to show that the A and B are sufficiently analogous such that if B is imaginary, then A is imaginary.

Christians are renown for the obligations they like to put on others, and in this sense Steve is right on schedule. Naturally, believers who find the cartoon universe analogy offensive in some way will want to respond by heaping burdens on the part of others as they seek to lash out in their frustration. But to whom am I supposed to show that "A and B are sufficiently analogous"? To someone who ascribes to a worldview which likens the universe to a cartoon? Indeed, if Paul's clay is sufficiently analogous to the Christian deity's creatures, how is a cartoon, whose fit within the context of Christianity's claims is so much stronger than Paul's clay, any less analogous? Indeed, to whom did Paul show that the potter's clay is sufficiently analogous to the Christian deity's creatures? If Christians find Paul's reasoning in Romans 9 sufficient for purposes of illustrating his point, how is the cartoon universe analogy any less sufficient? Blank out. Moreover, on what basis can a Christian discount the element of imagination here? What is the substance of the believer's prayer requests, if not the improvement of the present state of affairs that he imagines his god can bring about? Do the believer's imaginings exceed his god's capabilities? Can his god not also create talking rabbits which operate heavy machinery and conduct symphony orchestras, just as a cartoonist imagines? The real question is whether or not the believer *acts as if* the universe is the cartoon his worldview conceives it to be, or an objective realm which does not conform to any subject's whims. Does he own up to his confession, or does he shirk it? That is the question.

Time and time again, the Christian's effort to resist the absurdity of his own professed worldview falls flat on its face. But unlike a cartoon, the bloody nose on his face cannot be righted with the wave of an eraser.

by Dawson Bethrick

*posted by Bahnsen Burner at [6:30 PM](#)*