

Wednesday, May 02, 2007

Jet's Flimsy Denials

The apologist named "JET" is still sulking after [I responded](#) to [his objections](#) to my blog [Virginia Tech](#). In particular, he resents [the cartoon universe premise](#) of Christianity being exposed.

Jet writes:

Bethrick simply assumes, rather than argues for, exactly what people like myself, Greg Bahnsen and John Frame straightforwardly deny: That God's sovereignty renders humans puppets on a string.

Why would I need to argue this? It's emphatically affirmed in statements like "God controls whatsoever comes to pass" (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 160) and "God controls all events and outcomes (even those that come about by human choice and activity)" (Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis*, p. 489n.44). Since "human choice and activity" themselves could only qualify as "events and outcomes," they would fall in the category of things that "God controls" on this view. Otherwise statements like "God controls whatsoever comes to pass" would be patently false, and the Christian god would be ruling over something it does not control. Christians want to claim total sovereignty for their god, but when this becomes problematic, they run behind "No, no! That's not what we mean!"

Of course, theists are going to try to weasel out of the implications of such declarations, but this is to be expected given their worldview-wide habit of evasion. The theist needs to come clean on what he believes: either he believes that "God controls whatsoever comes to pass," which could only mean human beings are analogous to characters in a cartoon acting precisely as the cartoonist intends (indeed, as cogs in a massive "plan" which was set in motion long before we even came to be), or he doesn't (in which case his god is simply another entity among all the others of the universe, having no more significance than a rock). These are not my problems.

Jet writes:

This is a typical objection to a high view of God's controlling of the world, and it's been responded to again and again.

Sure. I'm quite familiar with all the "responses" that theists have presented in response to my points. I've already shown why they fail (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) for instance).

Jet writes:

Bethrick seems to have no desire to even acknowledge, let alone attempt to refute, the scores of responses to such an oversimplification and misrepresentation of the Bible's stance on this issue.

"...scores of responses..." none of which Jet reproduces for consideration. Jet alludes to what we're apparently supposed to fear: endless volumes of proofs and refutations all confirming the reality of the god he worships while he keeps them hidden in his back pocket. He really wants to believe this stuff, so he wants to create a scare crow in our minds by claiming it's looming overhead. I'm reminded of Butler's fitting quotation of Kant:

If, therefore, we observe the dogmatist coming forward with ten proofs, we can be quite sure that he really has none. For had he one that yielded... apodictic proof, what need would he have of the others? ("The Transcendental Argument for God's Existence," *The Standard-Bearer*, p. 65)

So long as what specifically he has in mind (assuming he has something specific in mind) remains out of sight, he can take comfort in the belief that it's not been "refuted." But enough with all the qualifications, dichotomies, reservations and nuances; either Jet's god "controls whatsoever comes to pass," or it doesn't. Choose a position and stick with it come hell or high water. Perhaps Jet has been in the fishers' hands so long he forgot how to swim, so he's trying to avoid the latter.

Jet writes:

Once again, to repeat something said in part 1 of this response, if you're going to address [Presuppositionalism](#), then address the presuppositionalist's view of divine sovereignty, not a [strawman](#).

If it is a strawman, why do presuppositionalists like John Frame (whom Jet mentions) and Vern Poythress stress the importance of analogies that are very close to the cartoon universe analogy that I have proposed?

John Frame confirms the appropriateness of the cartoon universe analogy when describing the relationship between his god and the universe as he likes to imagine it:

Perhaps the best illustration... is this: In a well-crafted novel, the author creates a world in which events take place in meaningful causal relationships to one another. Each event has an intelligible cause within the world of the novel. But of course each event also has a higher cause, in the author's mind. Normally, such an author will try to maintain the orderly causal structure of his created universe. He may, of course, also work "without, above, and against" that causal order when he is pleased to do so. (*Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*, p. 82)

Frame explicitly likens the "created universe" to a novel written by an author, referring to this as "perhaps the best illustration." I'll give Frame one thing: he's close. The author of a novel chooses every detail that characterizes the universe he wants to create in his novel. He creates the characters which populate it, and he chooses what parts they will play and what actions they will perform. Nothing in the novel appears or happens unless the author wants it and puts it there. This is especially true in the case of a skilled author. The characters do not make their own choices, the events in which they participate do not happen by themselves, and the outcomes are not a result of their intentions. Everything throughout the novel, from the first page to the last page, is precisely what the author intends. There is no exception to this, for the characters have no will of their own. Frame is right on, but behind the times. With the invention of cartoons, we now have an even stronger analogy for illustrating the relationship between the Christian god and the universe, as Christianity affirms it.

Then there's Poythress:

Dorothy Sayers acutely observes that the experience of a human author writing a book contains profound analogies to the Trinitarian character of God. An author's act of creation in writing imitates the action of God in creating the world. ([Why Scientists Must Believe in God: Divine Attributes of Scientific Law](#))

Like Frame, Poythress finds the analogy of story-writing quite illustrative of the relationship between his god and the universe he thinks it created. But a cartoon has the advantage of supplying details which the reader needs to supply in his own imagination as he reads a novel. So a cartoon delivers what the cartoonist has in mind on a perceptual level, where a novel still leaves much detail to the reader's own inventions. Also, a cartoon proceeds at its own pace, not the reader's. The reader of a novel can put the novel down at any time. But once a cartoon starts, it goes until the end, barring technical difficulties, loss of power or atheological review (which will bring the fantasy to a jarring halt - those atheistic spoilsports!).

Jet writes:

Man is not a mere puppet, he is a fallen creature created in God's image

Of course man is not a puppet. But this is not because "he is a fallen creature created in God's image" (which is a double absurdity), but because he is man and there are no invisible magic beings which are controlling his choices and actions.

Jet writes:

God does not work fresh evil in man's heart, nor were any of those who fastened Christ to the cross innocent victims whose arms God twisted. No Christian believes this. To fairly represent those with whom he disagrees, Bethrick should not concoct or imply positions that nobody holds.

So, Van Til does not hold that his god "controls whatsoever comes to pass"? Bahnsen does not hold that his god "controls all events and outcomes"? If one affirms these statements, he can only hold man responsible for anything by secretly contradicting them. Just as the god of the universe chose that I would be born in the western hemisphere with two arms, a nose, blond hair and ten fingers and ten toes, so it is with anything else about man, on this view, including his actions - actions which he could not choose any more than where he was born. It's "the accident of birth," as Van Til would put it in his pamphlet [Why I Believe in God](#).

Jet writes:

Second, if Bethrick is himself an atheist, the picture of reality that he proposes we adopt is truly silly. We are to believe that apart from the cartoonist, trees (that came about by undirected “happy” accidents) magically became paper (once again with no outside direction) and pencils also mysteriously formed out of primordial slop. Then this pencil began -through small micro-mutational adjustments-to pick itself up and draw a wonderfully harmonious world and likewise wrote and designed characters (without the help of a conscious mind directing it, now mind you) all with the same moral intuitions, capacities for logical reasoning and verbal communication.

Jet attributes to me a view which, bearing the description he chooses for it, is quite absurd indeed. Does Jet cite even one statement by my hand to justify his attribution of such a view to me? No, he does not. His worldview is so intertwined in the cartoon universe premise of theism that he cannot disentangle himself from it even to catch a glimpse of what a non-theistic view of the universe is like. Jet’s problem is that he does not realize that there is an alternative to the metaphysical subjectivism which Christianity inherently assumes. I have already written on this in the following blogs:

[Metaphysical Subjectivism and Christianity’s Cartoon Universe, Pt. 1](#)

[Metaphysical Subjectivism and Christianity’s Cartoon Universe, Pt. 2](#)

[Theism and Subjective Metaphysics](#)

Does my view propose that “trees... magically became paper”? No, men produce paper from wood pulp through a causal process which he discovered and understands by means of reason. Does my view propose that “pencils... mysteriously formed out of primordial slop”? No, men produce pencils from materials they find on the earth. Does my view propose that the world was drawn by a pencil which picked itself up and started drawing spontaneously? No, existence exists, and only existence exists. The alternative to my worldview’s starting point is to start with non-existence as one’s fundamental primary (for only then would it be necessary to “explain” the fact that existence exists; see for instance [Basic Contra-Theism](#)). Theism attempts to broker a compromise between its starting point of consciousness conscious only of itself (a patent contradiction) and beginning with non-existence as such (for apologetic purposes). Why not simply start with existence, and move on from there?

Jet gets after me for critiquing a position which he claims no Christian affirms, even though I can cite numerous sources from the Christian camp which affirm precisely what I am critiquing. But then he critiques a position he attributes to me but which I have nowhere affirmed. He does not even go to the trouble - as I have in the case of what I have critiqued - of citing statements to authenticate his attribution of said positions to me.

Jet also wrote:

So, life came from non-life, logic from the irrational, morality from the amoral, and meaning from non-meaning.

In a single sentence, Jet displays his penchant for [Tape-Loop Apologetics](#). If you follow the implications of what Jet presents here just a little further, it won’t belong until you find something along these lines:

Presupposer: "How can your chance-bound, relative-only materialistic worldview account for immaterial entities?"

Non-Believer: "I'm not sure what you're asking. But please, tell me, how does your Christian worldview account for the 'immaterial?'"

Presupposer: "By the self-attesting sovereignty of the Triune God of Christian theism."

Non-Believer: "Is this god material or immaterial?"

Presupposer: "God is wholly immaterial."

Non-Believer: "So let me get this straight: you 'account for' that which is 'immaterial' by appealing to that which you say is 'immaterial? How does that explain anything?"

Presupposer: [blank out]

Jet will want to know where life came from according to my view. The answer is simple: life came from existence. Does my view hold that "logic [comes] from the irrational"? No, and Jet nowhere presents any quotation from something that I have written which affirms that as my position. Like life, logic, morality and meaning all come from existence. In Jet's view, they come from an invisible magic being which he enshrines in his imagination.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [cartoon universe of theism](#), [Presuppositional Gimmickry](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [5:00 AM](#)

2 Comments:

[Future](#) said...

Sorry, I'm confused again. I haven't read all of Jet's posts, so I am just trusting that what you have said is accurate (which 'presupposition' you can grant I hope--(did I use that word right?)). I haven't read most of the books you refer to, so I don't know much about them either. So I'm coming pretty much only from your post and a small amount of study in rhetoric, and a bit more in logic. One problem: John Frame's "best illustration" doesn't seem to be the illustration for how men have "free will" and God is sovereign, but rather how there are causes within the world the author created and the cause outside that world (the author himself). So I think he is illustrating something different than you suppose. Same thing with Poythress: by your explanation (which is all I have to go on)--it seems that the analogy is actually Dorothy Sayers', not Poythress', but anyway--again the analogy isn't between free will and predestination (I think that's the word you used in another post). It is an analogy primarily for the creativeness of the author. So your cartoonist analogy seems to be a little different.

Oh, it also seems that things have gotten piled together--things that Jet or some of these other guys you and he cite probably wouldn't combine--when you say:

Of course, theists are going to try to weasel out of the implications of such declarations, but this is to be expected given their worldview-wide habit of evasion. The theist needs to come clean on what he believes: either he believes that "God controls whatsoever comes to pass," which could only mean human beings are analogous to characters in a cartoon acting precisely as the cartoonist intends (indeed, as cogs in a massive "plan" which was set in motion long before we even came to be), or he doesn't (in which case his god is simply another entity among all the others of the universe, having no more significance than a rock). These are not my problems.

From "God controls whatsoever comes to pass" we have concluded that people are "as cogs in a massive 'plan' which [sic] was set in motion long before we came to be". I don't see how these two are logically equivalent. Similarly for "he [God] doesn't" control whatsoever comes to pass, how is that equivalent or reducible to "having no more significance than a rock". I realize answers to these issues aren't your problems acc. to the post, but since you have created these dilemmas I want to make sure there is no other choice.

P.S. I don't think the dialogue set up is terribly fair...but I did like your post when you stated your view on where life came from, which I guess simply is that life didn't come from..., it just is. I found that very interesting! Thanks!

-BPF

[May 02, 2007 9:20 PM JET](#) said...

My response to your material has continued.

[May 05, 2007 10:23 AM](#)

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