

Friday, April 01, 2005

Paul's Empty Sling

Amateur Christian apologist Paul Manata has done me a big favor! He has advertised my blog - [Incinerating Presuppositionalism](#) - on his own blog - [Pressing the Antithesis](#)! And though he seems to have difficulty creating hyperlinks in his compositions, his free advertising is very well appreciated, just as mine is, too, I'm sure. I am grateful for this, because I'd love for all his Christian friends to come visit my blog and pay their kind respects.

Thank you, Paul!

Now, let's see what Paul wrote. Apparently, he didn't like what I wrote. But then again, he did not say this explicitly. In regard to my recent piece titled [The Cartoon Universe of Theism](#), Christian apologist Paul Manata writes:

“The point of his article is that Christianity is like a cartoon.”

That's not quite accurate. The point of [my article](#) is to show how the Christian view of the universe is analogous to a cartoon in the hands of its illustrator. If the universe is subject to the will of Paul's god, then my point must be true, for it simply points out that this notion is analogous to a cartoon and its relationship to the person who conceives and draws it.

Paul then writes: “We have a God who draws the universe, in a sense, just like a cartoonist draws his cartoons.”

Very good, Paul.

Next Paul writes: “He says God controls our thoughts like a cartoonist controls the thoughts of his cartoons.”

This statement does not represent the point I make in [my piece](#) for the following reasons:

First of all, I nowhere affirm the view that “God controls our thoughts”; if anyone affirms this, it would be someone who believes there is a god in the first place. That is certainly not something I think is true. Already Paul is missing a crucial distinction: he holds to the cartoon universe premise, while I do not.

Second, Paul's formulation of my point suggests that I attribute the power of thought to cartoons. I do not; I nowhere affirm that cartoons have thoughts.

Third, I nowhere incorporated the view that “God controls our thoughts” in framing the analogy that I identify. Paul seems to have misunderstood the following statements in my piece:

the theist imagines a supernatural illustrator who wishes the universe into existence and controls it just as ably as it controls its own thoughts. The contents of the universe conform to the thoughts of the divine consciousness just as the scenes of a cartoon conform to the imagination of the illustrator.

Notice the first statement here; it does not say anything about the “supernatural illustrator” controlling “our thoughts.” But of course, some Christians do in fact believe that their god does indeed do this. But not all Christians seem to be in agreement on this matter. Some Christians hold that men can choose their own thoughts, or at least that their own uncoerced volition plays a role in their thinking. But to be sure, the object that is said to be under the control of the supernatural illustrator, is the universe itself. And herein is where the analogy with the cartoonist manifests itself: Just as the cartoonist controls what happens in his cartoons, Paul thinks his god controls what happens in the universe. Paul does think, does he not, that his god ordained the earthquake and tsunami of December 26, 2004?

After quoting a paragraph from my brief essay, Paul asked: “But does Bethrick seriously think he has a point?”

Yes, I certainly do. Why would I post it on my blog if I didn't? And if Paul didn't think I was serious, why would he choose to respond to it?

Paul then asked: “I mean, are there not objective hermeneutical principles we can use when we interpret any literature?”

The issue is not hermeneutics, because this would at best be a secondary concern. The primary concern is whether one accepts what the bible says as truth, or not. Paul is on record affirming Christianity as if it were really true. Thus, he essentially ascribes to the cartoon universe premise. He cannot blame me for this, for this is not my doing; I did not choose for Paul Manata to affirm the cartoonist's conception of the universe as truth.

Paul then interjects: “I mean, I must assume that when he watches the evening news and the weatherman says that sunset is at 5:45 p.m. Bethrick really thinks the sun is going to set!”

It's not clear how this statement is at all relevant to the matter at hand (whether or not I accept what the weatherman says about the sunset has nothing to do with the strength of the analogy I have identified), let alone how it is implied in anything he said up to this point. It appears to be an attempt to divert attention away from his confessed affiliation with religious notions.

Paul then writes:

Or, take his buddy Francois's statement that we are 'immoral dogs'. I guess Bethrick has no way to determine if I am a human or a dog! If he says that it is literal, 'his case is pathological'. If he says that it is obviously figurative exaggeration, then ask him if the stories of one-celled organisms turning into thinking humans is also to be taken as exaggeration.

Again, it's not at all clear what point Paul is trying to make here, or how it is in any way relevant to [my piece](#). It certainly does nothing to dispel the analogy I have identified, but I suppose it's clear enough that my piece has struck a raw nerve. Again, how I take Francois' (note the spelling here, Paul) pronouncements, whether literal or figurative, has no bearing on the matter. It's also not clear what Paul has in mind when he mentions “the stories of one-celled organisms turning into thinking humans.” Perhaps he means the development of a fertilized human ovum into an adult human being. It's not clear why anyone would deny this reality. Apparently Paul has difficulty really engaging the issue at hand.

Paul suggests the following: “Ask him if he thinks that a non-rational universe giving rise to the ration is an exaggeration.”

Some editing here is probably needed, for by “ration” I am supposing he means “rational.” Paul seems to be writing in haste. That's fine, so I'll address the question.

I don't know what Paul means by “a non-rational universe.” The universe exists. This much is agreed. As I understand it, the concept 'rational' and its negations could only apply to a certain class of entities, namely those which possess a faculty of consciousness capable of forming concepts. For instance, we do not say that rocks are either rational or irrational, for rocks do not possess a consciousness capable of forming concepts. The concept 'rationality' applies specifically to judgments and decisions. But rocks don't make judgments and decisions. Rationality presupposes consciousness, but rocks are not conscious. And I certainly do not think that the universe as a whole is a conscious entity, so I would not say that it makes judgments and decisions, whether rational or otherwise. So it seems to me that Paul is simply committing the fallacy of the stolen concept here.

At any rate, it's unclear what relevance Paul's suggested question has on the current matter. Perhaps he thinks that the cartoon universe premise of his theism is preferable to the actual state of affairs, because he finds the latter depressing. But of course, that is not how truth is discovered and validated. How Paul Manata feels is not a means of validating any truth claim.

Paul suggests his readers ask me another question: “Ask him if he thinks that saying that the cell-dividing turned into the copulating is an exaggeration.”

It's not clear what this would prove. It certainly would not weaken the analogy I have identified. And again, I don't know what he means by “cell-dividing turned into the copulating.” Is he denying that cells multiply? Is he denying that some biological organisms copulate? If he has a point to make, he's guarding it very close to his chest, when it would be nice to see him share it with his readers.

And then he suggests yet another question for his readers to ask me:

Ask him about one-way lungs turning into two way lungs, non-sonar animals turning into the sonar-gifted, unthinking turning into the thinking, non-verbal to the verbal, and the first human being lucky enough to find a female who evolved in the same life time, and area, in order to be able to continue our race, is an exaggeration.

Again, I don't know what point Paul is trying to make here. What's clear is that he has not presented any argument which challenges the analogy I have identified. Indeed, I don't think he can.

Paul then stated: "So, though frogs turning into princes is not a comic book it is certainly a fairy tale."

Wait a minute! If Paul believes that the universe was zapped into existence by means of a conscious act, that there was a talking snake, that a burning bush spoke, that a man was born of a virgin, that a man walked on unfrozen water, that he turned water into wine just by wishing it, that disease was cured simply by wishing it, that a man was revived back to life after being dead for three days, why would he think that the idea of a frog turning into a prince "is certainly a fairy tale"? How did Paul come to this conclusion, given his allegiance to the cartoon universe premise? Apparently he just picks and chooses what he wants to believe, or someone else has done this for him.

Paul closes with the following statement: "If Bethrick complains that this is a misrepresentation (or misunderstanding) of his position, well, et tu."

To be sure, there was some misrepresentation in Paul's post, which I pointed out above. But most if not all of it was irrelevant to the point I made in my post. Indeed, the notion that the universe conforms to the desires of Paul's god, is directly analogous to the events in a cartoon conforming to the intentions of the cartoonist. If Paul is a Christian, he holds the cartoon universe premise, and yet apparently resents it when others point this out.

To settle the matter, perhaps Paul could answer a simple question:

Can your god make rocks sing?

Yes or no, Paul?

Another question he might not want to answer, given the rambling he presents in response to my brief essay, is:

Was Jesus' resurrection literal, or was it metaphorical?

Which is it, Paul?

At any rate, we should all be adult enough to draw the right conclusions from his answers to such questions. I know I am. That is why I do not ascribe to the cartoon universe of theism.

by Dawson Bethrick

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [7:18 PM](#)

3 Comments:

[Francois Tremblay](#) said...

Since he lives in a subjective universe, Paul may very well be an actual dog ! How would he know otherwise ? And given his intellectual level, he might as well be one.

[April 02, 2005 12:17 AM](#)

[Paul Manata](#) said...

Thanks for the tips Dawson. Also, thanks for pointing out my link problem, I have fixed it for you. I also changed the punctuation on Franc's name and one other minor detail. Other than that I think I can let this response lie since I do not feel it rebutted my original article. Anyway, your skill in grammar is always appreciated.

[April 02, 2005 11:23 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Paul: "Thanks for the tips Dawson. Also, thanks for pointing out my link problem,"

You're welcome, Paul.

Paul: "I have fixed it for you."

Don't do it for me. It's your blog to the world, remember.

Paul: "I also changed the punctuation on Franc's name and one other minor detail."

Good show, ol' boy!

Paul: "Other than that I think I can let this response lie since I do not feel it rebutted my original article."

You're relying on your feelings when you should be relying on reason, Paul. If you rely on reason, and compare your reaction to my post "The Cartoon Universe of Theism," you'll see that you didn't offer any challenge to the analogy I presented. This is what I pointed out in my response to your reaction. Most of what you presented was an irrelevant side-show (e.g., whether I think cell mitosis is literal or figurative has nothing to do with the strength of the cartoon universe analogy) that completely avoided the matter at hand.

In my response, I did ask two questions for you to consider, but I have yet to see your answers to them. They were:

1. Can your god make rocks sing?

and

2. Was Jesus' resurrection literal, or was it metaphorical?

I'll have more questions for you after you've answered these, so meanwhile I am supposing you must still be working on your answer to these questions. Or do you not see their relevance?

In the meantime, I have offered a new blog - "The 'God's Good Pleasure' Principle and the Cartoon Universe Premise" - which shows why the cartoon analogy I offer is superior to the analogy of the potter in Romans 9:21 and should be used by modern Christians instead of the potter analogy because of its appropriateness and accuracy. You may find it helpful in grasping the force of the analogy I have presented. In the final analysis, it all boils down to this: Either you believe the universe is like a cartoon in the hands of a master illustrator (theism), or you don't (atheism). I don't believe the universe is like a cartoon, so that makes me an atheist.

Paul: "Anyway, your skill in grammar is always appreciated."

Yes, there's lots to learn from me, Paul, and not just my skill in grammar. I tend to be a good speller, too.

Regards,

Dawson

[April 03, 2005 8:33 AM](#)