

Steve's Hays-ty Reaction to the Cartoon Universe Premise of His Worldview

Steve Hays of [Triablogue](#) is still [trying to wrest himself free of the cartoonish implications of the Christian worldview](#). Unfortunately for him, he has chosen to put before himself a hopeless task. The only escape is to abandon Christianity and similar mystical nonsense altogether.

Steve wrote:

Dawson Bethrick has attempted to defend his cartoon analogy.

The cartoon universe analogy has already been well defended in these blogs:

[The Cartoon Universe of Theism](#)

[The "God's Good Pleasure" Principle and the Cartoon Universe Premise](#)

[Omnipotence and Sovereignty in the Cartoon Universe](#)

Note particularly, in the third posting, the exchange with one Christian who, like Steve, sought to kick against Christianity's own pricks. At least that Christian fellow had the good sense to give up.

In [my previous blog on this matter](#), I had written:

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.

Steve responded:

Okay, so according to Dawson, reality never conforms to someone's intentions. That's a beautifully self-refuting statement, and I thank him for absolving the reader of any need to take his words seriously. If you go to Dawson's blog, you will find a lot of posted material, consisting of words. These words are real. They exist. But, according to Bethrick, his words don't conform to his intentions. Apparently, what he intended to communicate, and what actually appears on the computer screen are two different things. His fingers have a mind of their own. He mentally directs his fingers to type one thing, but they rebel and type up something else entirely. This must be a terribly frustrating experience for Bethrick. And given the mutinous state of his digits, the reader can never know what Bethrick meant to say. Maybe he was trying to post a recipe for walnut fudge brownies. But darn it if those seditious digits of his didn't thwart his culinary intentions.

Nice try, but no cigar. Steve finds that he needs to caricature my position in order to wriggle out of the cartoonish implications of his professed worldview, and in so doing he not only misses the essence of the analogy (not only of the cartoon analogy, but also Paul's own potter-clay analogy), he also misses the nature of Christianity's metaphysical position. In order to do this, Steve has to ignore the fact that, on my worldview, man is an integrated being of matter and consciousness. Had he more familiarity with my position, he'd know that his rebuttal only makes him look ignorant rather than successfully discrediting my position.

On my view, the frustration he projects does not exist; at least, not for me. I can, for instance, direct my own movements; my metaphysical viewpoint in no way contends against this fact. And through my physical movements, I can move other physical things. Steve cited the example of typing words out on a computer keyboard. I can direct my fingers to depress the buttons on my keyboard. If the keyboard and the computer to which it is connected are functioning properly, it is possible for me to type the words that I want to type by using the hardware to *transmit* my intentions. This, however, is not the same thing as *conforming* reality directly to my intentions in the manner that the cartoon universe of theism models. For instance, while I can *wish* that the buttons on my keyboard turn into hundred dollar bills all I want, no amount of wishing on my part will turn the buttons on my keyboards into something they are not. If I were the omnipotent deity that Christians imagine, then I could turn the buttons on my keyboard into anything I wanted them to be. After all, were I the Christian god, they would be buttons only because I intended them to be such in the first place.

No, the objects of awareness do not obey wishes. I can wish that pizza, potato chips and apple fritters are not fattening when consumed in mass quantities. But the objects of the universe will not obey my wishes; pizza, potato chips and apple fritters will remain as fattening as they are no matter what I wish, no matter how hard I wish it. Because I am an integrated being of both matter and consciousness, I am able to direct my own movements. But even this has its limitations. No matter how much I wish, I cannot fly like a bird does, nor will I ever be able to run a mile in 60 seconds. If reality conformed to my intentions, however, there would be no such obstacles to such endeavors. In the non-cartoon universe of atheism, I must govern my actions according to nature's constraints. My wishing will not override them.

Now, notice that the cartoon universe analogy does *not* rely on a caricature of Christianity. After all, Christianity asserts the existence of a creator-god *whose intentions directly control the objects which make up the universe*. According to this view, nature's constraints do not impede the ruling consciousness' ability to control the objects of the universe, just as in a cartoon the images we see act according to the intentions of the cartoon's illustrator. According to Christianity, if a man has two arms, it is only because the Christian god *wanted* it that way. If a slice of pizza has 600 calories, it is only because the Christian god *wanted* it that way. Nothing in the universe is the way it is without the Christian god's consent and decree. The Christian worldview is emphatic about the "all-controlling sovereignty" it claims on behalf of its god. As Boettner puts it:

Amid all the apparent defeats and inconsistencies of our human lives, God is actually controlling all things in undisturbed majesty. Even the sinful actions of men can occur only by His permission and with the strength that he gives the creature. And since He permits not unwillingly but willingly, then all that comes to pass - including even the sinful actions and ultimate destiny of men - must be, in some sense, in accordance with what He has eternally purposed and decreed. ([The Reformed Faith](#))

Like the cartoonist who controls the events that take place in his cartoons,

God controls all events and outcomes (even those that come about by human choice and activity) and is far more capable and powerful than modern machines. (Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, p. 489n.43)

Van Til affirms the same position:

God controls whatsoever comes to pass. (*The Defense of the Faith*, 3rd ed., p. 160.)

Similarly, in the context of a cartoon, the cartoonist controls whatsoever comes to pass. Nothing in the cartoon will appear unless the cartoonist willingly permits it to be there. The cartoon universe premise is particularly evident in the biblical notion of miracles. Take for example the miracle that the gospel of John has Jesus perform at the wedding of Cana. When it is discovered that there is no wine for the wedding guests, Jesus wishes the water in the six waterpots to turn into wine, something we would only see in cartoons. What the cartoon universe analogy serves to illustrate to a far greater degree than Paul's potter-clay analogy can hope to show, is the pervasive will-based sovereignty that Christians imagine their god has over the contents of the universe. Just as the universe is said to be dependent on the Christian god's intended designs for its origin and existence, the cartoon is dependent on the cartoonist's intended designs for its origin and existence. The contents of the universe, on Christianity's own premises, are what they are because the Christian god *wants* them that way. Similarly with the contents of a cartoon: they are what the cartoonist *wants* them to be.

Steve asks:

Does Bethrick believe that his computer keyboard can talk back to him and challenge his intentions?

Of course not, because I do not believe that the universe is analogous to a cartoon. A cartoon can portray a talking computer keyboard, one which dialogues with its user. And according to Christianity and the powers it attributes to its god, this is in the realm of possibility, for it endorses the view that reality is dependent on its god's conscious intentions. The serpent in the garden, for instance, holds a conversation with Eve, the woman that was produced when the Christian god commanded Adam's rib to become "an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18).

Steve asks:

Or does Bethrick believe that he can impose his will on the medium to make it say and do whatever he wants?

I can only "impose my will" on my own being, which is an integration of both matter and consciousness. My will does not directly manipulate the keys on my keyboard. If it did, I would not need to use my fingers to type them. Even in the case of volitionally directing the movements of my fingers, this only occurs within certain constraints within

which I must work if I am to achieve my aims. I cannot, for instance, type 5,000 words per minute, or make the words flash in five different colors when they are read by someone named Hank or Judy. If all my fingers are broken or my hands are cut off, I'm not going to be able to type in the first place.

Steve writes:

If so, then Bethrick must imagine that he's living in a cartoon universe wherein his fingers and keystrokes conform to his wishes.

Non sequitur. The keystrokes conform to the physical interaction of my fingers. If I did not have fingers, or if I forewent their use, the keys on my keyboard would not type out my thoughts as I think them. And in using my fingers to type, they do not conform exactly to what I wish, as I pointed out above. Nature requires me to practice my typing to develop my ability, and check my accuracy as I go. That's the non-cartoon universe of atheism in which I live. But whether or not I'm imagining that I live in a cartoon universe is irrelevant to whether or not Christianity likens the universe essentially to a cartoon. Steve is simply trying to lash out at me, but this won't alleviate his problems.

I wrote:

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?"

Steve responded:

It's disanalogous inasmuch as Bethrick is indulging in a bait-and-switch tactic. The true reason he seizes upon the cartoon analogy is due to the fictitious connotations of cartooning.

The fictitious connotations of cartooning are sufficiently fitting for a worldview based on fictitious premises, especially one which asserts a universe-creating, reality-ruling consciousness to whose will everything conforms. So there's no problem with my position here.

Steve writes:

Bugs Bunny isn't real.

And neither is the Christian god.

Steve tried to encapsulate the cartoon universe premise of theism as follows:

- a) Cartoons are fictitious
- b) The Christian worldview is analogous to a cartoon
- c) Ergo, the Christian worldview is fictitious

Steve views my analogy as an argument proving that Christianity is false. But readers should see that I did not attempt to draw this conclusion. The analogy simply brings out the absurdity of Christianity, and, having thus exposed it, leaves it up to the individual to decide for himself if a worldview which conceives of the universe in a manner like unto cartoons can offer a reliable guide to living. If the believer wants to believe Christianity in spite of its absurdity, he's free to believe it. But my question is whether or not he acts as if he lives, moves and has his being in the cartoon universe that Christian theism implies. My bet is that he conducts himself as I do, recognizing that the universe is not analogous to a cartoon.

Steve thinks that the cartoon universe analogy is flawed. He writes:

- a) In order for his analogy to work, he must show that Christianity is analogous to cartooning it is fictitious aspect. He has, however, offered absolutely not supporting argument for that comparison.

Again, characteristic of Christians, Steve seeks to put a burden on my shoulders, albeit rather clumsily, even though he's made absolutely no progress in dispelling the cartoon universe analogy. Christianity's analogues to a cartoonist and the cartoons he creates are the Christian god and the universe as Christians imagine it. They imagine that the universe was created by an act of consciousness (according to their mythology, the Christian god *willed* the universe

into being), and that the objects populating it *conform* to the creator's wishing. For instance, man has two legs and two arms, not because of biological causes, but because the creator-god *wanted* him to have two arms and two legs. The Christian god could just as easily have created man with 22 arms and 14 legs. Since Christians believe that their god created the universe, they claim that their god is "bigger" than the universe, and that nothing in the universe is exempt from its "all-controlling sovereignty." Similarly, a cartoonist can choose to draw images with two arms and two legs, and he can also choose to draw them with 22 arms and 14 legs if he so pleases. The cartoonist is "bigger" than his cartoons in the sense that he calls the shots in dictating what takes place in them. To the extent that Christians claim that the universe was created by the Christian god and possesses the nature that it allegedly gave to it, Christians are affirming the cartoon universe premise that is integral to its form of theism.

That having been said, however, it is unlikely that someone who wants to believe in a cartoon universe is going to accept any demonstration of the inherent falsehood of such a model. Steve is a prime example of such stubbornness and futility. It is, however, self-apparent to me that the cartoon universe premise of theism completely misconstrues the nature of the universe, since I have found no evidence of a consciousness which can manipulate its objects by means of mere wishing, as the Christian god is said to be able to do. In fact, all evidence that I have reviewed demonstrates precisely the opposite case: that consciousness must conform to its objects rather than having the power to conform its objects to its intentions, as I have explained numerous times in my writings. In fact, the very concept of truth itself assumes that the task of consciousness is not to create its objects and assign their identities at whim (cf. metaphysical subjectivism), but to perceive and identify them by means of proper names and concepts. The very concept of truth, then, necessarily assumes the non-cartoon universe of atheism.

Steve then said:

b) He also has the analogy backwards. In cartooning, the cartoonist is real,—but the cartoon is fictitious. So even if the analogy held, it would be predicated on the actual existence of the (divine) cartoonist.

Here Steve's reaching becomes most desperate. So anxious to validate his god-belief, he seeks to twist criticism out of shape in order to make it seem like it is confirming his view. But as Steve himself pointed out in [his previous message](#), "an analogy falls short of identity"; [I pointed this out](#) to Christian defender Tim Hudgins long ago. The analogy is an illustration by approximating a relationship in terms of relatively more familiar parallels. There are of course insignificantly disanalogous elements to the overall comparison, however more so in the case of Paul's potter-clay analogy than in the cartoon universe analogy (but we don't see Steve faulting Paul's analogy for this). These minor disanalogies in no way damage the essential point of the analogy, any more than a lump of clay not having flesh and bones impacts Paul's analogy in Romans 9.

Moreover, the cartoon analogy is in no way predicated on the actual existence of a divine anything. In fact, it is predicated on a metaphysical position which is anathema to that affirmed by Christianity, but without which Christian believers could not act in the first place. I have yet to find a Christian who gets into an automobile and expects its engine to turn on by wishing rather than by inserting the key into the ignition and giving it a good twist with a couple light pumps on the accelerator. Like the atheists they resent so much, Christians act *as if* the objects of their consciousness will not simply conform to their wishing. And in so doing, they performatively acknowledge the falsehood of their professed worldview. Indeed, they are in essence *borrowing* from a non-Christian orientation between subject and object.

Steve says:

To make his case, Bethrick needs a reverse analogy: the cartoon is real, but the cartoonist is fictitious.

Not at all. Both cartoonists and the cartoons they create are very real, just as a potter and the clay he works with are real. If cartoons were not real, how would people watch them on their TV screens? The validity of the analogy does not in any way depend on its Christian analogues being actual. Does the point that Van Til seeks to illustrate in his analogy of the water man depend on the actuality of "a man made of water in an infinitely extended and bottomless ocean of water," who "makes a ladder of water" in an attempt "to climb out of the water"? (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 102.) Of course not. Steve clearly needs to give this matter some more thought.

Steve wrote:

So Bethrick has failed to show that Christianity and cartooning are relevantly parallel, and even if they were analogous, the analogy undercuts his contention.

Wrong again. If Paul's potter and clay are analogous to his deity and its creations, then so are a cartoonist and the

cartoons he creates, for the same essential reasons. In fact, as I have shown, the cartoon universe analogy is even stronger than Paul's analogy of the potter and clay. In the case of Paul's analogy in Romans, the potter is working with a pre-existing substance - namely the clay he uses to mold artifacts. Here's a point of disanalogy with what Christianity claims about its deity and its creation which the cartoon universe analogy symbolically overcomes: the universe, claims Christianity, was created *ex nihilo*. In other words, the deity did not take some pre-existing material and then reshape it, as a potter does with clay. In the case of a cartoon, however, the cartoonist approximates the *ex nihilo* creation of the universe claimed by Christianity by starting with a blank slate and drawing whatever he wants, where he wants and when he wants, just as the Christian god is alleged to have started with no pre-existing materials and proceeded to create what it wanted, where it wanted and when it wanted by wishing them into existence. For instance, cartoonist can give his cartoon a horizon with 27 moons instead of our one moon. Similarly, the Christian god can create a planet with 27 moons (Christians think that their god created Uranus too, don't they?). The cartoonist could decide to give his cartoon horizon 27 moons "just because," as he faces no constraints on his blank slate that will limit his creativity to a number less than this. Similarly, the Christian god, when creating a planet, can give it 27 moons "just because," since no constraints will limit its creative abilities. It just wishes, and the planet and its moons will magically appear.

I wrote:

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.

Steve responded:

A Christian who understands the theology of prayer will pray according to the promises of God. God is not a genie. Prayer is not an exercise in rubbing Aladdin's lamp. You don't get three wishes.

What the bible explicitly teaches and what a particular theology teaches are often quite different. Rival Christian groups are always pointing this out to each other. But here the bible is explicit in its promise that its god will deliver when asked. Observe:

Mt. 7:7-8 states: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

Mt. 18:19 states: "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

Mt. 21:22 states: "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

Jn. 14:13-14 states: "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."

Jn. 15:7 states: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

Jn. 16:23-24 states: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

I welcome Steve's and any other Christian's efforts to downplay promises such as these, for I do not believe them either. They are, however, just a few of the verses that one can find in the New Testament which explicitly promise wish fulfillment. In terms of Christianity's cartoon universe, the believer is like Bugs Bunny having acquired self-awareness and being told by his illustrator (in whose "image" he was illustrated) that he can have whatever he wants just by asking for it. "Ask, and ye shall receive," says the promise of the divine cartoonist. The promise does not say, "Ask, and I might grant it." It clearly states "ye *shall* receive." But it is interesting to see Christians backpedaling from the bible's explicit promises, giving us the image of Bugs Bunny asking his cartoonist to give him a parka when he's drawn in an arctic setting, the cartoonist saying, "No, not just yet... You're going to have to freeze your little tail off first." All too often the bible models the divine cartoonist playing with its creations.

The obviousness of a cartoon's fictitiousness is due to its overt modeling of metaphysical subjectivism. This of course varies from genre to genre, but is most explicit in children's programs, and also in worldviews like Christianity. Once one realizes this, he will see that Christianity is clearly false, because it assumes a false metaphysical basis. Reason and rationality assume the non-cartoon universe of the atheist, for the universe we live in operates according to Bacon's famous dictum: "Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed." We saw this above in the example of typing on a computer keyboard. To transmit my intentions, I have to work with reality, because the objects with which I work do not obey my intentions. On the contrary, they obey natural law, and I have no choice but to work with natural law if I want to achieve anything.

But the universe as Christianity essentially conceives of it operates according to the cartoon dictum: "Nature, to be commanded, must be *willed*." According to the myth, what the Christian god *wills*, immediately becomes reality. The Christian god wills the universe to be, and it is. No fussing with natural laws here. What Christian would say that the objects of the universe do not directly obey his god's will? The Christian god will say to this rib, "Become thou Eve!" magically the rib turns into Eve upon command. The Christian god will say to the rain clouds, "Flood ye the earth!" and the rain clouds will obey, letting loose their waters to flood the earth, just as the divine cartoonist has commanded. The Christian god says to the flora and fauna of the earth, "Go now to Noah and get your sorry butts into his waiting barge!" and in the cartoon universe of theism, they obey as commanded. We are not told how koalas and kangaroos find their way to Noah's ark from the Australian landmass, but according to the myth they did so, just as they were commanded. For in the cartoon universe of theism, there is no exception to the primacy of divine wishing, no exception to the obedience that this wishing brings about in the objects which populate the universe. The "how" does not matter, for the lessons that the bible is intended to impart are not meant to have practical applicability in the non-cartoon universe of atheism where questions like "How did that happen?" make sense. What's important here is obedience to the ruling will, the all-controlling subject, on the part of any object. This will has the power to command any object in the cartooniverse, and any object so commanded shall obey without exception, just as the actions of Bugs Bunny obey the wishes of an illustrator.

Now, I certainly do not think the universe is analogous to a cartoon. Either Steve agrees with me that the universe is not analogous to a cartoon (and thus implicitly agrees that a worldview which likens the universe to a cartoon misconstrues the nature of the universe), or he disagrees with me, thus affirming that the universe is analogous to a cartoon. Steve has not made his position on this clear. I think that part of Steve's problem is that he's been working himself too hard, nervously posting hasty reactions to criticisms of his cartoon universe worldview without giving his own position the critical consideration it so sorely needs. I suggest he slow down, consider what he's responding to more carefully, and be willing to subject his own position to the same level of critical scrutiny he wants to have applied to rival positions. It's not hard to see the cartoon implications of theism, unless of course one is determined to resist them no matter what evidence is put forward. But what is he really resisting in that case? Is he resisting criticism? He thinks so. But in actuality, he is resisting the teachings of his own worldview. Child psychology is effective on [the mind of a child](#) who doesn't want to grow up.

by Dawson Bethrick

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [7:00 PM](#)

5 Comments:

[Aaron Kinney](#) said...

Wow that was intense, but Steve's attempt to escape the Loony Tunes attributes of his Christian worldview fails miserably.

He simply can't admit that, by necessity, an existence created ex nihilo from a conscious being is equivalent to a cartoon universe.

Damn third party nihilists! Keep rockin Dawson :)

[June 21, 2006 10:49 AM](#)

[openlyatheist](#) said...

I fail to see how the analogy of universe to cartoon is more offensive to the Christian than the analogy of humanity

to clay.

Nice bait & switch Hays tries to pull himself; claiming that if Dawson can type on a computer Dawson must be manipulating reality and therefore calling his own worldview a cartoon. Belabored, yet sneaky.

Definitely a disciple of Manata, this Hays.

[June 21, 2006 8:35 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Steve's whole approach to this matter is wrong-headed. He seems to think that, if he can ridicule me enough, this will defuse the criticism of Christianity that I have raised. In this way, Steve is like so many other internet apologists. For instance, he titled his blog "[Dawson's Mickey Mouse Philosophy](#)," as if my worldview assumed the cartoon universe premise of theism, like Christianity. Steve needs to understand (I thought it was apparent already) that I am not a theist. There's nothing in my conception of the world that he has shown to be analogous to the relationship between a cartoon and its cartoonist. In fact, it is only on the basis of a non-cartoon universe worldview such as mine that one can raise worldview objections in the first place. For to raise worldview objections, one needs the concept of truth (e.g., that some statements accurately reflect the actual state of affairs, while others do not), and the concept of truth assumes the non-cartoon universe of theism (i.e., a universe in which the objects we perceive do not alter in order to conform to someone's wishing). That is to say, the concept of truth assumes a universe where reality is objective, which means: the objects of consciousness exist independent of consciousness.

Needless to say, whether I am sane or not, whether I am rational or not, whether I can read the New Testament in Greek or not, whether I have read 5,000 books on New Testament scholarship or not, these are irrelevant to the fact that Christianity models a cartoon view of the universe. Steve apparently finds satisfaction in calling me an ignoramus. That's fine. I doubt this really makes him feel better, but if it does, that tells us who he really is. Besides, he's the one who's defending a worldview which essentially likens the universe to a cartoon.

Regards,
Dawson

[June 22, 2006 8:12 AM](#)

[Francois Tremblay](#) said...

Whoever it is you were debating, wasn't doing a very good job of even asking a question. Rather pitiful show.

[June 23, 2006 3:42 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bthrick, you were on a show? Was it an online radio show? Where can I get a copy of it?

[June 23, 2006 4:51 PM](#)