

## Steve's Persisting Haysiness

I want to begin by thanking Steve and every other Christian out there who has attempted to challenge the cartoon universe analogy. The more they battle against it, the more apparent it is that they can't knock a dent in it. But few have given me the pleasure that Steve Hays has given me in his botchy attempts to undermine it. Here we have Christian apologetics in its most entertaining form.

I had written:

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.

Steve fumbles:

Once again, Dawson has to run away from his own words and come stumbling back with an armload of caveats which were distinctly absent from his original reply I respond to what people say when they say it.

Here Steve admits his own hastiness. But in what way did I "run away from [my] own words"? In no way have I changed my position. My position has always been that man is an integrated being of matter and consciousness, and that he needs reason in order to learn how to work within the constraints of the universe in which he lives. These are not "caveats" by any measure of the term. All we have here is exposure of Steve's ignorance of my overall position and his own attempt to excuse himself. Steve then comes out and admits his ignorance while trying to trivialize it in his characteristic condescending manner:

It's true, though, that I've not chosen to immerse myself in all things Bethrickian—just as I don't own The Essential Barry Manilow album, or a velvet painting of Elvis. Due to the brevity of life, we have to make many tragic choices with our limited time and resources.

I tend to prefer the term Dawsonian. And if this is a valid excuse for one's lack of intimate familiarity with a particular position, then it's available for my use as well. Like Steve, I too have time constraints crowded with far greater priorities than explaining where mystics go wrong. But as a form of entertainment, it does have its place in my life. This is precisely why I had stated the following in [the very blog that he attempted to answer](#):

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.

Moving on...

I wrote:

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.

Steve responds:

At the risk of stating the obvious, this is exactly how a cartoonist operates. He expresses his intentions through a physical medium, such as computer animation.

The humanity and existence within the non-cartoon universe of atheism have never been denied from actual

cartoonists. Nor does the cartoon universe analogy require it. But it does not at all follow from this point that

all that Bethrick has succeeded in doing is to illustrate his ontological commitment to a cartoonish worldview.

How does the fact that actual cartoonists themselves are human beings like me living in the non-cartoon universe of atheism suggest "ontological commitment to a cartoonish worldview"? Steve does not explain this. It appears that, in his efforts to sidestep the analogy, he has misconstrued it beyond recognition at some point while hoping to find some way to launch a counter-charge. This does not succeed because my worldview does not affirm the view that the universe is a product of someone's consciousness. Since my worldview does not take theism's imaginary super-consciousness itself seriously, and offers no like counterpart in its place, there is nothing in my worldview analogous to a master cartoonist calling all the shots in the world's state of affairs. Nor does my worldview affirm the view that the objects of consciousness are creations of someone's wishing, or that they conform to someone's wishing in the manner imagined by theists on behalf of their god. Again, it seems that in his persisting haste, Steve is dropping key contextual points that I have already made explicit. [As I had stated](#),

Steve needs to understand (I thought it was apparent already) that I am not a theist.

Had Steve grasped this point, he would see how wrongheaded his statement above is.

I had written:

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.

Steve responded:

Notice how his cartoon analogy instantly breaks down. A cartoonist does not conform reality "directly" to his intentions. A cartoonist doesn't merely wish cartoon characters into existence.

What has broken down here is Steve's own confused analysis. Essentially, Steve has confused the ink, paper, celluloid, or other technology with which a cartoonist works, with the imaginary realm that he uses these materials to create, a fake environment that is analogous to a universe created by a supernatural consciousness which determines its contents and events. The cartoon universe analogy in no way requires that cartoonists "merely wish cartoon characters into existence," nor is this what it is intended to illustrate. And Steve nowhere provides an argument to validate the supposition that the analogy requires this. Indeed, the analogy is perfectly compatible with the fact that an actual cartoonist himself does not exist in a cartoon universe similar to the one imagined by Christians. On the contrary, *it is only because the cartoonist lives in the non-cartoon universe of atheism* that such points can be raised to begin with, so Steve's objection here completely fails as it completely misses the point. Steve is making the same mistake that Tim Hudgins made in response to the cartoon universe analogy over a year ago. He was expecting the analogy to model "exact similarities" between cartoonists and the god he imagines, even though a strong analogy in no way requires such pervasive exactitude. [I corrected](#) this misguided assumption when I stated the following:

As for finding "exact similarities" between these things, I don't think there is anything in reality that can serve as an exact analogy to what Christians and other mystics call "the supernatural," simply because it bears no objective reference to reality.

Again, if Steve took the time to familiarize himself with the sources that I had [cited in my post](#), he would see that he's merely raising issues that have already put to eternal rest.

Steve affirmed:

Yes, an omnipotent God can wish things into existence by sheer willpower

Note that Steve explicitly affirms a view which reduces to the metaphysical primacy of consciousness. Just by saying that this is true, he contradicts himself, for the very concept of truth presupposes the metaphysical primacy of existence. Consider: does Steve think that it's true that his god "can wish things into existence by sheer willpower" because he *wants* that to be the case? No, of course not. When he offers a truth claim, he tries to make use of the primacy of existence in that the state of affairs he purports to be identifying is thought to obtain independent of his or anyone else's wishing. The concept of truth is only meaningful on the primacy of existence. On the primacy of

consciousness, there would only be what we in a primacy of existence universe call 'absurdity'. There would be not 'truth' as we know it.

He then hastened to add:

but this distinguishes God from a cartoonist.

And likewise, this also distinguishes the Christian god from the potter in Paul's potter-clay analogy. But this does not disrupt the usefulness of this analogy for the purposes it is intended to illustrate, namely the apostle's theodicy. Same with the cartoon universe analogy: although actual cartoonists are human beings who exist in the non-cartoon universe of atheism, and thus do not have the subjective primacy over their objects that Christianity attributes to its god, this is in no way sufficient to undercut the usefulness of the analogy for the purposes it is intended to illustrate. Steve is attempting to shift contexts. As I already pointed out, the cartoon universe analogy in no way requires that actual cartoonists have the subjective powers that Christianity claims on behalf of its god, and Steve has offered no argument to show that the analogy does need this. Rather, it exemplifies the primacy of the creative will of the Christian god over the realm it allegedly created by noting the same primacy of the will of the cartoonist over the realm he creates in his cartoons. Steve is probably too deeply mired in the swirling and chaotic confusion of the cartoon universe assumptions inherent in his worldview to see the unreasonableness of his objections. I'm reminded of a wise point that [Francois Tremblay raised](#) for the benefit of those who might have the pleasure of engaging theists in debate when he wrote:

The disadvantage of following reality is that you also need to follow its complexity. Fictional positions are not bound to this restriction.

In other words, fictional positions are not bound to the constraints of an objective universe. On the cartoon universe premise of theism, imagination, not reason, is the means of validation.

I had written:

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 watch how Steve recycles the same objection over and over again, even though the premise needed to raise it is not vital to the analogy itself in the manner that his objection requires it to be, and in spite of the fact that such objections have already been answered by anticipation.

Steve responded:

Once again, a cartoonist cannot make things happen by a sheer act of the will. So Dawson's precious analogy is a systematic failure.

Consider the implications for Romans 9 here: a potter cannot make things happen by a sheer act of the will. So Paul's potter-clay analogy is a systematic failure. Thus we have failure in the bible.

I wrote:

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.

Steve responded:

A cartoonist does not exercise direct control over the animated images. A cartoonist is constrained by the limits of the physical medium.

Likewise, a potter does not exercise direct control over the clay from which he forms household objects, any more

than a cartoonist does not exercise such direct control over the images he creates in his cartoons. Like a cartoonist, a potter is constrained by the limits of the physical medium. Again, such points do no damage to the points that these analogies are respectively intended to illustrate, so such objections can safely be filed in the round "So what?" bin.

I wrote:

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.

Steve responded:

Bethrick, in his gimboid confusion, is repeatedly conflating two quite distinct propositions: (i) Correspondence between object and intent (ii) Causal immediacy These are not interchangeable or mutually inclusive propositions.

As is typical with many apologists, Steve is here attempting to obfuscate the issue by multiplying concepts beyond necessity (which is commonplace in theology) and then charging his opponent with failing to make similar (albeit arbitrary or irrelevant) distinctions. Steve needs to decide for himself whether or not he believes the slice of pizza has 600 calories because his god ultimately wanted it that way. That is, is he or is he not willing to commit himself to the view that the objects of the universe obey his god's will ("intent") regardless of whatever immediate causes he may agree exist as a means of transmitting that will from its source to the object in its final state? What holds primacy here - the obedience of created objects to the creating will, or "immediate causes" which we find in nature? Is it, or is it not the case, that "God controls whatsoever comes to pass," as Van Til tells us?

I wrote:

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 responded:

Observe the shifting definition.

Which definition does Steve think I'm "shifting"? It's not clear, but from the foregoing it's apparent that, while earlier he seems to have been (erroneously) assuming that the cartoon universe analogy supposes that the cartoonist can wish his cartoons into existence (which I nowhere affirmed), while now he catches onto the actual point of the analogy, namely that in the cartoon realm that the cartoonist creates, he calls the shots (just as in the realm that the Christian god is said to have created, the Christian god is thought to call all the shots). Is Steve really unable to see the parallel here? Consider the irony here: I'm expected to believe in an invisible magic being which created the universe ex nihilo and plans all of human history according to some preordained design scheme, but at the same time I'm expected not to see the obvious parallels between a cartoonist and the cartoon realms he creates, and the Christian god and the universe it is said to have created? This is simply amazing!

Now, recall that Steve had asked:

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

To this question, I responded:

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 then responded:

Bethrick is now committing a level-confusion. This is no longer a relation of causal immediacy between a cartoonist and the cartoon, but a relation between animated objects within the cartoon. Yes, all sorts of things can happen "in" a cartoon. But that is not analogous to the ontological relationship between a cartoonist and a cartoon. The cartoonist is not, himself, a cartoon character who directly interacts with other cartoon characters or animated scenery. A cartoonist exists outside the cartoon, and creates the cartoon through the manipulation of a physical medium.

The confusion here is all Steve's. Even the point he raises here supports the analogy rather than undermines it. For in the case of relations between animated objects within the cartoon, they do what the cartoonist wants them to do, just as according to Christianity, the objects in the "created universe" do what its god wants them to do. The parallel situations here are, by definition, analogous to one another. The differences which Steve has tried to amplify in his objections are trivial. What is essentially similar to both the cartoon realm created by the cartoonist and the "created realm" of the Christian universe, is the predominating, determining will of the agent responsible for creating each. The objects and events which take place in each are *determined* by a conscious being outside it. In Christianity's cartoon universe, "God controls whatsoever comes to pass," and in the realm of the cartoonist, the cartoonist controls whatsoever comes to pass.

I wrote:

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 responded:

Exactly the same thing applies to a cartoonist or computer animator.

Right - *in the non-cartoon universe of atheism*. Also, exactly the same thing applies to a potter working his clay into a pot. Why? Because *he exists in the non-cartoon universe of atheism*. Again, Steve needs to realize that I don't think the cartoon universe of theism is true.

I wrote:

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.

Steve responded:

And in a non-cartoon universe, a cartoonist must also use his fingers to depress the buttons on his computer keyboard.

Perhaps now Steve will realize why I am an atheist: I realize that I do not live in the cartoon universe that Christianity affirms.

Steve wrote:

By contrast, God is fundamentally disanalogous to a cartoonist inasmuch as God does not require a physical medium to make things happen. Indeed, he creates the physical medium itself.

But the Christian god is fundamentally analogous to a cartoonist inasmuch as, like a cartoonist with respect to the contents and events that take place in the realms he creates, the Christian god is said to "control whatsoever comes

to pass." What exists in the Christian god's universe is what the Christian god wanted to exist in it. What we see in a cartoon is what the cartoonist wants us to see. This is the analogy. The analogy was never "cartoonists create ex nihilo the physical medium which they use in making their cartoons, just as the Christian god created the universe ex nihilo." So this is a most abtuse objection.

Of course, if the Christian god did "not require a physical medium to make things happen," then why did it create the physical medium in the first place?

Again, as [I pointed out to Tim Hudgins](#),

I don't think there is anything in reality that can serve as an exact analogy to what Christians and other mystics call "the supernatural," simply because it bears no objective reference to reality.

I wrote:

Steve views my analogy as an argument proving that Christianity is false.

He now says:

No, it doesn't prove anything since the analogy is systematically bungled.

Steve doesn't seem to know whether he's coming or going, but is trying to play all positions so that he can cover himself. For below we will see him conclude that my "analogy either proves too much or too little." Perhaps while responding to my points he changed his mind. And yet, why does he think the cartoon universe analogy is "systematically bungled"? Essentially, because the cartoonist does not create his cartoons ex nihilo, as the Christian god is said to have created the universe. He's objecting to something other than the cartoon universe analogy. Indeed, this objection is so trivial with respect to the parallels that have been pointed out that one might entertain possibility that Steve may very well be deliberately trying to be tongue in cheek. Indeed, if the cartoon universe analogy is "systematically bungled" because human cartoonists do not wish into existence the physical medium which they use to draw cartoons, then what can be said of Paul's potter-clay analogy? The apostle himself gives us a precedent for analogizing the Christian god by comparison to a potter who fashions useful items out of clay. But do human potters create the clay they work with ex nihilo? No. Does this damage the point that the apostle was trying to illustrate by means of analogy? I don't think so.

I wrote:

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.

Steve responds:

Observe, once more, how he merges two distinct propositions: (i) created by an act of consciousness; (ii) corresponding to the creator's intentions.

It's not a "merge" in the sense of blurring such distinctions, but a point where the two overlap with one another. In fact, my analogy is compatible with a careful mindfulness of such distinctions, as should be clear. For while a cartoonist does not create the physical media which he uses to create his cartoons (an affirmation which my analogy nowhere affirmed in the first place), the cartoonist does create the realm that informs his cartoons. He determines everything that takes place in his cartoon, just as the Christian god is said to determine everything that takes place in the universe. Steve continually fumbles on this point. For instance, observe the same point that he keeps repeating over and over:

A cartoonist does not create a cartoon by a sheer act of consciousness.

And again I point out: the analogy in no way requires that the cartoonist create his cartoons by "a sheer act of consciousness," if by this expression we mean something along the lines of a creation ex nihilo materialization of physical media. And Steve nowhere argues that a cartoonist needs to do this in order for the cartoon universe analogy to be valid for its intended purpose. It is in the realm that he portrays in the cartoons that he creates that the cartoonist calls all the shots: just as the Christian god, so we are told, determines the course of human history, the cartoonist determines the course of events that take place in the imaginary realm of his cartoons. The cartoonist

need not have the ability to wish his cartoons into existence in order for this parallel to obtain, and it is this all-determinative aspect of the cartoon universe premise of theism that Steve continually overlooks, or perhaps deliberately ignores. Just as Christianity teaches that “God controls whatsoever comes to pass” in the context of the universe it allegedly created, the cartoonist controls whatsoever comes to pass in the realm of his cartoon. There is nothing analogous to this subject-dominant determinism affirmed by Christian theism in an atheistic worldview.

Steve writes:

A cartoon may well conform to his intentions, but if what is what Bethrick means by a cartoonish worldview, then this is descriptive of his own worldview—in which agents, through the use of a physical medium, regularly make objects conforming to their designs.

Again, Steve has carelessly dropped the defining context of a cartoon. It may be the case, and in a specifically constrained, naturalistic sense, that human beings, either individually or jointly, conform certain material substances and objects to our designs. But this is in no way analogous to what Christianity portrays, nor is it analogous to what a cartoon realm portrays. In the non-cartoon universe of atheism, a plumber, for instance, may bend a pipe to direct the flow of water around a corner. But the plumber did not also create the house, the city street on which it is situated, the other people in the city, the trees, blades of grass, birds, clouds, blowing wind, barking dogs, buzzing bees, etc., etc., etc. A plumber bending a pipe to fit the needs of his project has no control over these things; they all exist and take place independent of the his intentions. The plumber is not determining the entire course of human history by doing this. In a cartoon universe, however, all things are being controlled and determined by a single conscious being. In the context of the earth, for instance, the Christian god decides if there should be a river and where it should be located. Similarly, in the realm of a cartoon, the cartoonist decides if there should be a river and where it should be located. The Christian god determines how many bends the river will have; likewise, the cartoonist determines how many bends his cartoon river should have. Similarly, the Christian god determines who the winners of a war that takes place on earth should be. And likewise, the cartoonist determines who the winners of a war that takes place in his cartoon realm should be.

Steve sought to summarize the problems with the cartoon universe worldview as he has sought to characterize it. Let's see how well they stack up:

i) It is disanalogous with the Christian worldview vis-à-vis creation ex nihilo

This has already been answered above. As I pointed out, the analogy does not subsist on paralleling the abilities of a cartoonist with those attributed to the Christian god by believers in terms of being able to create his cartoons by an act of sheer consciousness (e.g., creation ex nihilo). Rather, the parallel involved in the analogy is the "all-controlling sovereignty" which the Christian god is said to enjoy over its creation vis-à-vis the "all-controlling sovereignty" which the cartoonist waxes over the realm he creates in his cartoons.

ii) It is analogous to his secular worldview vis-à-vis the relation between intent and its extramental objects.

This too has already been answered above. Since this point requires us to put the analogy as it is originally conceived completely out of focus, it can only be foisted on the basis of misconceptions like those that Steve is peddling. By doing this, Steve denies himself the benefit of understanding just how his worldview's conception of the universe is acutely analogous to a cartoon. As I pointed out above, since my worldview does not affirm that human history is being determined by an omnipotent agent which calls all the shots, the cartoon universe analogy cannot apply to my worldview. There is, in the non-cartoon universe of atheism, no conscious being which enjoys "all-controlling sovereignty" over all the objects which exist in that universe, nothing which "controls whatsoever comes to pass," as a cartoonist does in his cartoons. The Christian god's control over the events which take place in the universe is said to be total, and likewise the cartoonist's control over the events which take place in his cartoons is also total.

iii) With respect to (ii), this is also analogous with the Christian worldview, vis-à-vis the creature/Creator relation.

Christianity's so-called creator-creature distinction is really just another way of affirming the master-puppet relation. Recall what Greg Bahnsen affirmed:

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. (*Van Til's Apologetic*, p. 489n.43)

On Christianity's view, Steve is just a puppet, Paul's lump of clay in someone else's hands, manipulated to do whatever pleases the universal cartoonist.

But if (ii) picks out the Christian worldview as cartoonish, then by the same token it also picks out the secular worldview as cartoonish. So the analogy either proves too much or too little.

Well, it's good that Steve is here conceding that the analogy at least proves something; above he said that "it doesn't prove anything." And yet below, he went on to claim that I've provided no argument in the first place, and yet it seems pretty difficult to prove something unless one has presented an argument. But as I pointed out, since the non-cartoon universe of atheism lacks the all-controlling dictator that Christians imagine, (ii) is wholly misguided. Besides, as I had pointed out before, whether or not I myself affirm a cartoon universe worldview is irrelevant to the fact that Christianity surely does.

I wrote:

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.

Steve responded:

As we've seen several times now, this comparison falls far short of metaphysical subjectivism. For the ontology of creation ex nihilo is essentially disanalogous to the causal process of cartooning.

As we've seen several times now, Steve's attempt to dismiss the cartoon universe premise of the Christian worldview because actual cartoonists do not create their cartoons ex nihilo is based on a misunderstanding of what the analogy parallels. The analogy never claimed that "the causal process of cartooning" is analogous to the Christian god creating the universe ex nihilo. The analogy shows the parallels between a god determining everything that happens in the universe it created and a cartoonist determining everything that happens in the cartoon he creates.

I wrote:

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 retorted:

It is especially unlikely that someone will accept Dawson's demonstration when his demonstration is so thoroughly inept.

I strongly doubt that it would be due to any ineptness on my part that someone would fail to acknowledge the validity of the analogy I have presented. As I pointed out in the statement that Steve responded to here, if someone wants to believe in a cartoon universe, it's unlikely that he will accept any course of reasoning which shows such a model to be flawed. I understand this quite well myself, being a former believer. There was a time when I was much like Steve, anxious to validate the Christian worldview in my mind. Like Steve, I was not inclined to take such criticism lying down. But in my case, the unlikely happened and I eventually woke up. Now, having distanced myself a ways from what had compelled me emotionally, I have a clearer understanding of all this.

I wrote:

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.

Steve responded:

Now he's equivocating. Cartoons are entities. So they are ontologically real. But the world they depict is fictitious.

Good grief! I just pointed out that "both cartoonists and the cartoons they create are very real," and while expressing



agreement with me, he accuses me of equivocating. The question is whether cartoons are real or not. In fact, my statement was in response to one that he had made: "the cartoon is real, but the cartoonist is fictitious." Steve's Hays grows thick which each trial.

Steve wrote:

And Bethrick trades on that connotation when he says that Christianity has a cartoonish worldview. And in so doing he commits a level-confusion. Once again, his analogy falls apart.

So, is it *not* the case that the Christian god "controls whatsoever comes to pass"? We know that a cartoonist "controls whatsoever comes to pass" in his cartoons. Is Steve admitting that his god is just a chimera after all?

I wrote:

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.

Steve bucks:

No, the cartoon analogy does not "approximate" creation *ex nihilo*. That confuses the fictitious world of the cartoon with the real world of the cartoonist. The difference could not be more elementary or elemental. And it thereby fails to distinguish the Christian worldview from his own worldview.

I did not say that the cartoon analogy *itself* approximates creation *ex nihilo*, but rather that the *cartoonist* can approximate such a phenomenon in his cartoons. That is, the cartoonist can illustrate a realm in which a character comes upon an open field and commands a tower to exist, and as if by magic the tower appears where before there was just an open field. In so doing, he gives us a portrait of what wishing something into existence might look like.

I had quoted a few of the bible's promises regarding the power of prayer:

**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 then wrote:

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.

Steve responded to this, saying simply:

We don't downplay these promises. We also don't quote them out of context, detaching them from a theology of prayer.

The over-arching context of these promises on the Christian view is that they are issued by an agent which has the power to deliver on them. Also integral to the Christian context of these verses is that the god which issued them is trustworthy, that it will not lie, that it will not leave the believer in the cold, that it loves the believer and hears his prayers. Now, it needs to be borne in mind that these promises are not my statements; I did not author them - they came from the bible, which Christians tell me is true (indeed, many Christians like to ridicule me for not believing it). It also needs to be borne in mind that much theology is driven by the private recognition on the part of the theologian that he does not live in the cartoon universe that his confession affirms. This is why the more explicit teachings of the bible, such as the promises I itemized above, are frequently downplayed by drowning them in a context fabricated by amplifying surrounding statements beyond their scope and at the expense of the "harder sayings" against which those surrounding statements are pitted. Of course, we should expect believers to deny that such promises are being downplayed. We should never be so naïve as to expect honesty from people who want to defend a faith scheme.

I wrote:

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.

Steve then responded:

i) Bethrick never advances the argument.

I "never" advance an argument? Is this consistent with other statements he has made? See above.

Steve wrote:

ii) And if that were not bad enough, he is also confusing creation, providence, and miracle. The flood is not the effect of creation ex nihilo. Gathering the animals into the ark is not the effect of creation ex nihilo.

Well, I nowhere affirmed that the Noachian flood or that the "gathering of animals into the ark" was an "effect of creation ex nihilo." But on Christianity's premises, all of these things that took place on earth were willed by the supernatural cartoonist.

Steve confirms explicitly:

There is no "how" to creation ex nihilo.

There we have it: the alleged creation of the universe happened *no how* - and yet we're supposed to accept the claim that the universe was *caused*. How? Well, no how. How's that? *No how*. The overboiling of the Christian Zen pot makes a veritable Master Po of any internet apologist. Just as I pointed out: the 'how' is unimportant, so might as well deny all applicability of the term when it suits expedience.

Steve wrote:

BTW, Genesis doesn't say that there were koalas and kangaroos in Australia before the flood. It doesn't say Australia was there before the flood. It doesn't say the current species or subspecies of koalas or kangaroos existed before the flood, or—if they did exist—where they were.

Indeed, in a cartoon universe, Australia could have been formed from a summit in the Andes (like Eve being formed from one of Adam's ribs), while the South American landmass could have been formed from the hip of the African continent after Noah's floating menagerie landed, thus providing a progressive land bridge on which some survivors (but not others) could have traveled to their final destination. Or, once Noah's ark landed, the divine cartoonist could have simply rearranged the continents and the distribution of the animal survivors, wishing Australia into place and magically teleporting the koalas and kangaroos into place. After all, in a cartoon universe, anything can happen, and the 'how' really doesn't matter, for in the end it all happens "no how" anyway.

Steve wrote:

Unbelievers try to make the flood account look artificially problematic by interpolating a number of extra-narrative assumptions into the narrative.

And the ever-ready ad hoc plasticity of the cartoon universe of theism, which ultimately reduces to "it happened no how," sees to this. The cartoon universe premise inherent to Christian theism allows the believer to piggyback on the arbitrariness of his imagined god: the sky's the limit when it comes to supposing what "accounts" for the current state of affairs.

I wrote:

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 responded:

What I don't agree with is a maladroitness confusion between two distinct modes of subsistence. What would be meant to say that the universe is analogous to a cartoon? Does that mean that the cartoonist is a part of the cartoon? That he's a cartoon character? Or that he is apart from the cartoon?

As I expected, Steve does not come out and say whether or not he agrees with Christianity that the universe has a cartoonish nature. At this point, he should understand what this means if he had been considering what I've been saying rather than merely reacting. His mind is aswirl in a persisting haze.

But Steve does ask some juicy questions here. Can the cartoonist be part of the cartoon? According to Christianity, the answer is *YES: the cartoonist can and did play a role in his own cartoon universe*. This is the role of Jesus, the god of the heavens who "took on flesh" (i.e., assumed a form like other characters in his cartoon) and intermingled with its creations. In such a case, the cartoonist is of course initially distinct from the cartoon he creates. But as with any piece of art work, a cartoon is full of autobiographical elements which are sourced in the agent who creates it. Same with the Christian universe, according to Christians. We are told that "there is a rational God who has created a rational universe" ([The Christian Professor](#)), and that the supposed 'rationality' of the universe is a "reflection" of this "rational God" which allegedly created it. And since this god is all-powerful and "does whatever pleases him" (Ps. 115:3), nothing could stop the super-cartoonist from penciling himself into his own cartoon. And according to the Christian myth, this is precisely what the super-cartoonist did. Development of these points can wait for another occasion.

by Dawson Bethrick

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [1:00 PM](#)

## 2 Comments:

[Daniel Morgan](#) said...

Steve is just digging himself deeper with comments like these:

*By contrast, God is fundamentally disanalogous to a cartoonist inasmuch as God does not require a physical medium to make things happen. Indeed, he creates the physical medium itself.*

You didn't call him to the carpet on this, but let's consider it--if God doesn't require "a physical medium", then at least God requires *some medium*, in which "things" can happen, where we suppose that "things" are separate entities from God itself.

Is "spirit" not supposed to be some substance, analagous to matter, in that it occupies a specific volume of, and position in, space in relation to other substances? Could God do *anything* without its cartoon book? If it didn't have a medium on which to project its will, it would only have itself. Indeed, your analogy is not only strong, I would dare to go so far as to call it perfect.

Steve is probably just miffed that he lives in a cartoon universe, and was called on it, by those who look around them and recognize that such a universe is just as subject to the cartoonist's eraser as it is his paint brush. No natural laws exist in a cartoon. The "illusion" of them is the cartoonist's desire to have its cartoon characters believe in them. The primacy of existence, as you pointed out, is undermined.

I'm glad non-Christians like us don't live in such a universe. Losing the boundaries of possibilities is akin to living in a dream...a nightmare. This cartoonist can do *anything*, at *any point in time*, and I have reason to suppose that it won't. Demons, leprechauns, fairies, unicorns, all are possibilities, composed of this "immaterial" *spirit* stuff, which is kind of like a different palette that the cartoonist uses--one whose colors are transparent 99% of the time, which is indistinguishable [to us] from these objects "poofing" into existence at the cartoonist's whim 1% of the time, kind of like a peripheral/ fancy/ complex character meant to "spice up" the tenor of the cartoon.

I called my deconversion ["returning to sanity"](#) for good reasons.

[June 26, 2006 3:12 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Steve wrote: "*By contrast, God is fundamentally disanalogous to a cartoonist inasmuch as God does not require a physical medium to make things happen. Indeed, he creates the physical medium itself.*"

Daniel responded: "You didn't call him to the carpet on this, but let's consider it--if God doesn't require "a physical medium", then at least God requires some medium, in which "things" can happen, where we suppose that "things" are separate entities from God itself."

In other words, the Christian god would need some plastic medium, regardless of its nature - whether physical or something other than physical (whatever that might be), *in order to stage the events it wants to take place*. This is not saying that it needs the physical medium for itself in any way (Christians want to make sure that they don't concede any implication of neediness on the part of their god.) In my blog, my basic approach to this point was simply to ask why this god finds it important to stage these events in the first place, though your statement here helps to clarify this question better. The Christian god is said not to require anything, so it's already a given in Christianity that its god did not "need" to create it per se. It chose to create its cartoon universe and stage the events that it wanted to take place within it because doing so "pleases" it. Its pleasure, after all, is its own self-sufficient standard, its only ultimate guide, its only measure of value. Christianity's affirmation of "law" thus breaks down to mere commitment to unconstrained whim.

Daniel: "Is "spirit" not supposed to be some substance, analagous to matter, in that it occupies a specific volume of, and position in, space in relation to other substances? Could God do anything without its cartoon book? If it didn't have a medium on which to project its will, it would only have itself. Indeed, your analogy is not only strong, I would

dare to go so far as to call it perfect."

And yet I've been told that it is "systematically bungled." But again, if the cartoon universe analogy is "systematically bungled" because a cartoonist does not wish into existence the physical media he uses to illustrate his cartoons (something the analogy never claimed in the first place), then likewise Paul's analogy of the potter and his clay must be similarly "systematically bungled" as well, since a potter does not wish the clay he works with into existence. But we don't see Steve making such criticisms of Paul's analogy, because it comes from his "precious" bible. Instead, he retreats saying that "Paul didn't use the potter analogy to illustrate creation ex nihilo." But the cartoon analogy is used to illustrate the determinism of Christianity - since its god "controls whatsoever comes to pass" in the universe it allegedly created, just as a cartoonist "controls whatsoever comes to pass" in the cartoons he creates. He claims that an analogy "does need to be identical at the salient point of comparison," but in fact an analogy is defined as a "resemblance in some particulars between things otherwise unlike: similarity: comparison based on such resemblance" ([Merriam-Webster](#)). Steve is so worried by the analogy that he finds the need to redefine it out of existence. Doesn't work.

Daniel "Steve is probably just miffed that he lives in a cartoon universe, and was called on it, by those who look around them and recognize that such a universe is just as subject to the cartoonist's eraser as it is his paint brush. No natural laws exist in a cartoon. The "illusion" of them is the cartoonist's desire to have its cartoon characters believe in them. The primacy of existence, as you pointed out, is undermined."

I can't really blame Steve for being miffed, especially after putting the energy into responding to me. But while doing so, he mentioned a couple times that I wasn't worthy of taking seriously. So why does he take the time to respond to me so much?

Yes, it's true, whatever is penciled into the cartoon can be revised or even erased at the direction of the cartoonist running the show. The cartoonist can have a woman running along one minute, and the next have her turn into a pillar of salt. Does this violate any natural laws? Well, if there are any natural laws, they're only there because they were penciled into the realm by the cartoonist in the first place, and his eraser is as big as his pencil. And of course, as you mention, since the cartoonist is in control of the characters which populate his cartoon universe, he can endow them with whatever delusions it wants them to have. In the end, it's all "God's good pleasure." That's the only ultimate standard that obtains in the cartoon universe of Christianity, since that's the only standard by which the cartoonist who determines its contents and events operates.

Note this pertinent quote by Van Til himself:

"God may at any time take one fact and set it into a new relations to created law. That is, there is no inherent reason in the facts or laws themselves why this should not be done. It is this sort of conception of the relation of facts and laws, of the temporal one and many, imbedded as it is in that idea of God in which we profess to believe, that we need in order to make room for miracles. And miracles are at the heart of the Christian position." (*The Defense of the Faith*, 3rd ed., p. 27)

The Christian god, on the basis of whatever happens to please it, can revise reality whenever it wants to. A substance can be water one minute, and wine the next, just because. A man can be sinking in the waters of an inland sea one moment, then walking on the water as if it were a solid the next. A man can come along to the foot of a mountain and yell the words "Be thou removed to yonder place!" and the mountain obeys. These are all things we can see in a cartoon whose events are designed and controlled by a cartoonist, who determines what we will see.

Yes, it is a perfect analogy. It perfectly exposes the absurdity of Christianity's determinism. Even Steve admits that he's a puppet, and in fact takes pride in it. If he were truly a puppet, would he have a choice in the matter? Indeed, how does he know who's holding the strings? If he's a puppet, he believes whatever the master puppeteer wants him to believe.

Regards,  
Dawson

[June 27, 2006 4:24 AM](#)