

The Strengths of the Cartoon Universe Analogy

The more I examine the cartoon universe analogy, the more I see how strong it is in applying to the Christian worldview. I have pointed out that, if Paul's potter-clay analogy in Romans 9 is a valid analogy, then the cartoonist-cartoon analogy is vastly superior, for various reasons. And the more I look at it, the longer the list of those reasons grows. The potter-clay analogy is found in the bible, and it is unlikely that Christians would say that anything in their beloved bible is invalid. So it is most curious to find Christians resisting the cartoon universe premise of their worldview, even though it is precisely this premise that they seek to defend.

Cartoons are a creation of skilled artists who conceive of their characters and the events in which they participate according to the value-judgments held by those artists. These artists design their cartoons and plan the events that take place in them, putting their conceptions into concrete form for purposes of enjoyment.

On the Christian view of the world, the universe is a creation of a conscious creator which conceives of its creatures and the events in which they participate according to the value-judgments it allegedly holds (i.e., the value-judgments of those who imagine the creator). On this view, the creator designs the universe and plans the events that takes place in it, putting its conceptions into concrete form for purposes of enjoyment.

Like cartoonists, the Christian god is characterized as a conscious entity. It can think, desire, command, get angry, remain angry, seek vengeance, condemn, behave destructively, etc. A famous argument for the existence of a god is the so-called "argument from design." Like cartoons, Christians think the universe was *designed* by a master designer. According to this view, the things that exist in the universe were conceived, designed and created by a creator which is said to have remarkable abilities. Man on this view has two arms and two legs, for instance, because the Christian god *chose* to create him this way. The Christian god could have easily created man with five arms and six legs if it wanted to.

Similarly, the images that we find in a cartoon were conceived, designed and drawn by a cartoonist who demonstrates remarkable drawing abilities. Bugs Bunny is a rabbit standing upright on two legs with long floppy ears and a bushy cottontail, for instance, because the cartoonist chose to draw him that way. The cartoonist could have just as easily drawn Bugs Bunny to resemble an actual rabbit, having it on all fours with its belly to the earth.

Christians often speak of "God's plan." Yes, that's right: their god, they tell us, is directing the entire course of human history according to what some defenders have called a "[divine plan](#)." This "plan" entails a design scheme down to the most miniscule detail. As apologist Mike Warren [puts it](#), "All facts outside of God originate as a creation of God according to His eternal, comprehensive plan," [adding that](#) "the ultimate constant is God's evaluation of worth and His plan." In other words, every event in human history was intended to take place according to this divine plan, since "God controls whatsoever comes to pass." (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 3rd ed., p. 160)

Similarly, the cartoonist has a plan for the cartoons that he creates. One cartoon's plan might involve a coyote's futile chasing of a lightning-quick roadrunner through a desert. Another cartoon's plan might involve superhuman heroes battling evil villains and their nefarious schemes. Yet another might involve the adventures of a boy in an amazing fantasy world that includes a giant floating peach. What Christian would say that their god cannot create a giant floating peach? After all, just as the cartoonist is not working with pre-established images on his drawing board, the Christian god is not confined to creating things from pre-existing materials. As Van Til puts it, "God had to create if he wished to create at all 'out of nothing'." (Ibid., p. 26) The cartoonist could have kept the peach that he draws to a small fruit growing on a tree just as easily as he can draw an enormous peach which floats in the air and contains living quarters for a young boy and his friends. And according to Christian mythology, so could the Christian god.

Another point of analogy between Christianity and cartoons is the fact that we typically do not see the cartoonist when we are watching a cartoon. We can see, for instance, the coyote being crushed by a giant boulder which fell on top of him from a high cliff, but we do not see the cartoonist as this happens, nor do we see him when we see the coyote emerging from underneath the boulder and walking around like an accordion. Similarly with Christianity: the world's events are said to be controlled by the Christian god, but we do not see this god, just as we do not see the cartoonist responsible for the events in a cartoon. I Timothy 1:17 declares that the Christian god is "invisible." Likewise, in the context of a cartoon, the cartoonist himself is also "invisible." This again shows that the cartoon universe analogy is superior to Paul's potter-clay analogy of Romans 9, for we can see the potter as we watch him work the clay he spins and molds into the shape he wants his product to have.

For these and other points that I have brought out in the past, it is clear that the cartoon universe analogy more fittingly models the Christian conception of the universe than the analogy we find in Romans 9. If Paul's potter-clay analogy is valid, then the cartoonist-cartoon analogy is vastly more valid. What Christian would say that something in the bible is not valid? Again, I am simply exposing the inherent absurdity of Christian theism as a worldview on its own terms. It is not my fault that Christianity conceives of the universe in a manner that is analogous to a cartoon. And it is not my fault that the world that a cartoon paints is fake. So it will not do to chastise me for the astounding appropriateness of the cartoon universe analogy. Christians who object to the cartoon universe analogy should take a closer look at what they're telling non-believers to believe. An argument for Christianity is essentially an argument for the cartoon universe premise.

by Dawson Bethrick

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [8:00 AM](#)

3 Comments:

[the_arkie](#) said...

Dawson,

This is a general comment regarding the many posts on this site. Thanks for the opportunity to revisit some good cartoon memories. I have read some of what you have written and I am immediately impressed by the logical coherence of your arguments. So I hope that you will understand that my comments should not be viewed in any way as an attack on your intelligence. But I would like to suggest a few things for your consideration.

1) Since you prefer the rationalistic approach, what would be your view of evidential apologetics?

In contrast to presuppositional apologetics, which require the person to believe certain standard absolutes about God and the universe before ever being able to come to know God, evidential apologetics are first and foremost, evidence based. That would certainly be more in keeping with your rationalistic approach. Some of your comments or posts would indicate that your conclusion is that evidence does not support the existence of a God who is the sovereign creator of all things, but I think that it is important for you to never completely rule out the possibility that the God of the Bible exists. In other words, based upon your present view of the evidence as you have come to see it, Jehovah is not real and the Bible is not authoritative. That has now become for you, your presupposition. If presuppositionalism as a mode of rational thought is incorrect, be careful that you do not come to the same place by your own rational thought. You may later gain more pieces to the puzzle. You might want to leave room for the possibility of changing your mind. What if your presupposition . . . that rational human thought is the highest standard of truth . . . ends up being faulty?

2) Your communicative skills may be superior to most, but that does not mean that your conclusions are.

I was often frustrated as a student by one particular English teacher. I learned much from her, because she was very intelligent and highly skilled in the English language, but the frustration came from not being able to "out-debate" her. Even when I knew that she was wrong and I was right, she could still "win" the argument. Even when SHE knew that she was wrong (and would smile at me with a knowing look on her face), she could still "win" the argument. I could say more, but it would sound like I am trying to flatter you by praising your intelligence. Just remember that it is possible to be an impeccable debater, and still be wrong.

3) If your own intelligent words and thoughts are carefully crafted, does not reason lead us to conclude that the source of your intelligence (your mind/your brain) is carefully crafted as well?

At this point, I doubt that the suggestion of an "intelligent designer" comes as a surprise. Nevertheless, it amazes me to think that such an intelligent person as yourself would not acknowledge your creator. Wouldn't it be a shame to come to the end of life and find out that you were wrong? Can you just imagine . . . imagine God saying to you that you had much less excuse than the majority of people since he had given you a superior intelligence to see all the intricacies of his creation? Can you imagine standing in his presence, and suddenly realizing that you had used the mind that he had given you . . . to marginalize his sovereignty or to reject the fact that he existed? I know you can come up with a rational response to this line of questioning, but nevertheless, what if?

4) Faith, by the nature of what it is, is much harder for the intelligent mind to submit itself to.

Faith requires leaning on someone or something else, instead of self. Quite frankly, you might not see any need to do so. A person with seemingly impeccable logic would have much more reason to feel self-sufficient. If you feel like you have something solid to lean upon, why would you look for anything firmer to give you support? Especially when, from your perspective, other things seem to be as reliable as a swaying reed. Except in this case, the kind of support needed is not physical, but a support for life. Upon what should the whole of life be rested? For you, it seems that it is human logic and reasoning. And there is no doubt that what you have chosen is far superior to the weak things that many choose to rest their lives upon. Some rest their lives on physical security or provision. Some rest their lives on social acceptance or being loved. Some rest their lives on social superiority (physical, intellectual, talent-related, position/rank). And then others rest their lives on that which supercedes this present life . . . the possibility that there is presently something that transcends what we call space and time. Ultimately, even though I could call upon an enormous body of evidence to demonstrate the reality of Jehovah and the reliability of the Bible . . . ultimately that requires faith . . . faith in someone beyond yourself. To lean on someone who is presently unseen. And for a person with reason enough to trust himself, because of his intellectual prowess, faith of that kind is very difficult.

At the end of all this, I suppose that it is only fair that I apologize. Not for what I believe, but for the fact that I, a complete stranger to you, would expect you to listen seriously to what I have to say. We generally trust the opinions of those whom we have had opportunity to learn to be worthy of our trust. I am coming to you without a history. I am aware of the challenge that presents to your ability to "hear" me.

My motive is not to "dethrone" you or your position. My motive is to share with you some ideas for your consideration . . . just in case no one has ever taken the time to share them with you.

Only respond if you feel my comments are worthy of it.

Thanks for your patience.

Respectfully,

PAUL

[June 23, 2006 5:59 PM](#)

[openlyatheist](#) said...

Dawson,

I had a teacher who once illustrated the evolution of metaphors for comparing "the mind" to technology. He said: "First, it was: The mind is like an adding machine. As time went on, it became: The mind is like a computer. Today it is: The mind is like a hologram."

You have gone from Clay to Cartoon. I think you should update the Christian universe to "3D Computer Animation." That sounds more sophisticated, no? Computer animators can do way more than cartoonists, and cheaper. ;)

[June 23, 2006 10:53 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Paul,

Thank you for your kind comments and thought-provoking questions. I'm glad you stopped by and have taken a look at some of my blog articles, and am giving some thought to your questions and the issues you raised. I hope to get a response posted either later today or early this coming week. So please stay tuned!

Openlyatheist,

Thanks for stopping by again. Interesting analogy about the mind, comparing it to various technological advances. I'm reminded of Peikoff's comparison of knowledge to a modern city when he sought to illustrate the hierarchical nature of rational knowledge in concrete terms. He wrote:

"Human knowledge is not like a village of squat bungalows, with every room huddling down against the earth's surface. Rather, it is like a city of towering skyscrapers, with the uppermost story of each building resting on the lower ones, and they on the still lower, until one reaches the foundation, where the builder started. The foundation supports the whole structure by virtue of being in contact with solid ground." (OPAR, p. 130)

It is true that computer animators can do significantly more than the cartoonists of Disney's day, for instance. And I'm sure it's a lot less painstaking work as well, since the technology of computers has replaced the need for an accurate drawing hand from start to finish. But in either case, we have a person creating an imaginary realm in concrete, visual form so that others can perceive what the cartoonist or animator has imagined. Whether 3d computer animation or classic Looney Tunes, we still have a realm that is under the total control of the individual (or individuals) who create it. The events that take place in the moving picture are entirely determined according to the animator's plan, from beginning to end, just as the course of human history is said to be determined according to a "divine plan." In precisely this way, the universe as Christianity imagines it is directly analogous to a cartoon.

Regards,
Dawson

[June 25, 2006 12:12 PM](#)