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“Theological Compatibilism and Animation: Object of Wrath”

By

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Object of Wrath is a study of the traditional controversy of freewill and determinism that has been debated by theologians and philosophers for centuries. The project began with an intrigue for a philosophy that deals with both sides of the established arguments, something that had been defined as compatibilism by its champion, David Hume, in the late 18th Century A.D.

Hume emphasized that a will cannot be completely free because it is bound to the cause and effect relationship. That is, while we are free to make choices, those choices are dependent upon our nature, but also, all things as we know them are a result of a cause and cannot rationally be called free, including the will.

The nature of the will is also a subject that was debated by Augustine and Pelagius in the 5th century A.D. The discussion centered on the freedom of man; specifically his moral ability to choose between good and evil. The Christian understanding of original sin, the inheritance of damnation caused by the Fall of Adam, the federal head and representative of the human race, was openly questioned by Pelagius. Since he was

attempting to change a Christian doctrine, it was natural for other Christians at the time to compare his teachings with those found in Scripture. Because of this investigation and clarification, which was primarily conducted by Augustine, Pelagius was excommunicated and his teaching declared heresy by the Church.

The parallels between the teachings of Augustine and Hume center on the idea of compatibilism; that freewill and determinism are somehow compatible. Augustine's theology declared that man's will is bound to its moral nature, be it to sin or to Christ, and Hume taught that any decisions made by an individual will *always* be derived from the nature, or intentions, of the heart. The significant difference between Hume's secular compatibilism and what has been termed theological compatibilism is the nature of the determining factor, or what causes the nature of a man to be what it is. Augustine and other prominent theologians such as Martin Luther and John Calvin stated that God, being sovereign over His creation, decides the nature of man's will. Hume, being a skeptic and naturalist, tried to put the determining factor within the physical realm.

The short animation *Object of Wrath* mirrors theological compatibilism simply because there is a personal creator of the animation; the simulated ink of the animation did not determine itself to have a will – the will was given to the animated creature by the animator. Also, the animation is not an attempted defense or complete explanation of theological compatibilism; it is simply an investigation of the subject as it is referenced from The Bible. Because of this, it will retain the mystery and complexity of issues such as responsibility of the creature's actions and the right of the animator over the ink.

The term “object of wrath” is a reference to Romans 9, a passage that speaks of God as a Potter who, from the same lump of clay, creates pots to prepare for destruction

and pots to glorify. *Object of Wrath* depicts the artist as the god over his creation, the animation, and his designing the creature to be one that is wicked in order that he may show his anger against rebellion by destroying it. I am exploring the hypothetical notion of the animated creature having a separate will from the animator. Although the animator moves the creature and decides what he is, there are two planes of existence involved; the time-space of the animator and another existence for the “time” of the animation. While the animator provides the creature with a will, and even moves the creature to the actions he does, the creature does not know this. Because the creature does not feel physically or psychologically coerced and understands himself to be making active choices, he appears to have a free will. I feel this relates to an understanding of the difference between mankind and God in that, while we are bound to a linear timeline and are unable to see the future (as an animated creature is unable to know what the next cel in his sequence will be even though the animator is fully aware of it), God is omniscient not only because he can see all frames of our existence in a simultaneous fashion, like a storyboard, but He is ultimately the animator of creation.

Examples of animation throughout the 20th century all point to the idea of compatibilism. Artists are inclined to develop characters that act as if they had a will of their own, and many times the animator will interact with the animation, further signifying the development of another willful agent. Examples such as the Fleischer’s *Koko the Clown*, McCay’s *Gertie the Dinosaur*, and Jones’ *Duck Amuck* are clear illustrations of compatibilist freedom. *Object of Wrath* is a similar view of the philosophy, but it was my intention to focus on the theological understanding of the determining cause. I feel that the animator and his creation is a strong metaphor that

reflects many instances in Scripture, and it is important for the topic to be readdressed in the modern Church.

Developing the completed animation for *Object of Wrath* required that I address many technical issues beyond the normal system of modeling, texturing, rigging, animating, physics simulation, rendering, and compositing. Each of these phases involved a unique thought process that led me to create new tools and document my work methods. I utilized MEL scripting in Alias' Maya application to create IK/FK switches for the arms and legs, and I also researched ways to best represent the different planes of existence for the animator and the creature by using LDRI and "toonshade" rendering. This project was tremendously involved; careful planning and testing was necessary to integrate the seven phases of production into a finished animation.