

Does This Argument Justify “Christian Rock” and “Christian Rap”?

An avid supporter of “Christian rock” and “Christian rap” recently presented to me a “thought experiment” as part of his refutation of an argument that I made against these genres based on the sinful origins of rock music. This post carefully examines whether this argument justifies these genres of music.

A “Thought Experiment”

Here is what this believer offered as a “thought experiment” in defense of his views about these genres:

Let’s do a hypothetical Stone Age. A violent people invent a tool that allows them to sharpen rocks into flint knives. This has never happened before, and soon they’re cranking out knives by the dozen. That’s all they’ve used that tool for, so in their minds, it is ONLY a tool for creating weapons. They use it to kill and maim people, and they talk about how great it is that they’ve discovered this awesome knife-making tool, a tool that, as far as they know, is only for making knives.

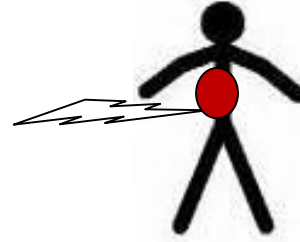
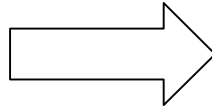
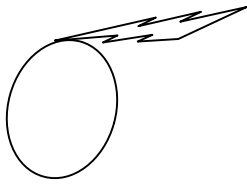
There’s also a pacifistic people. They hear about this new tool, and they abhor it as an instrument of violence. After all, that’s all they’ve ever known it as, and that’s all they hear about it. However, someone soon discovers that the tool, which had previously been known only as an instrument of violence, can also be used to sharpen hoes, shovels, and other farming implements.

The tool, which came out of a culture of violence, that had previously only known one use—an evil use of violence and death—was actually revealed to be a lot less specific. Instead of a tool for making knives, it was merely a tool for sharpening. It could be used for good or ill, to make weapons or plows.ⁱ

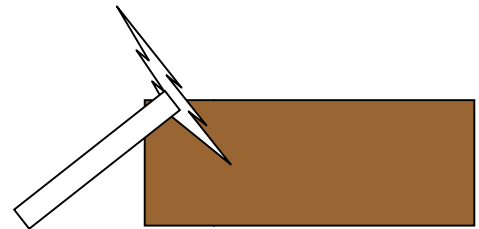
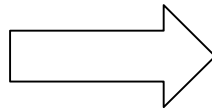
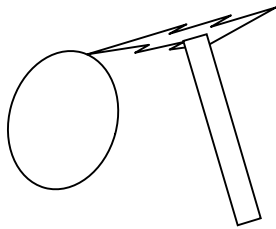
Based in part on what he believes this argument establishes, he argues that it is invalid to oppose “Christian rock” and “Christian rap” based on the sinful origins of rock music. A close examination of this “thought experiment” as a justification for these genres of music shows that it does not justify them.

A n Examination of This Argument

Here is a pictorial representation of the first part of this argument (what the violent people did):



Here is a pictorial representation of the second part of this argument (what the pacifistic people did):



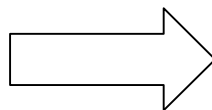
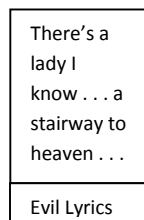
A careful examination of the two pictures reveal a vital facet of both scenarios:

The tool originally invented for the wicked purpose of sharpening the knives that were used to murder people did not play *any direct role* in murdering the people; in other words, the violent people did not use the sharpening tool directly as the instrument with which they murdered the victims—in fact, the victims had no direct contact with the sharpening tool.

Similarly, the sharpening tool did not play *any direct role* in plowing the fields—those who plowed the fields did not use the sharpening tool to plow the fields, and the fields had no direct contact with the sharpening tool.

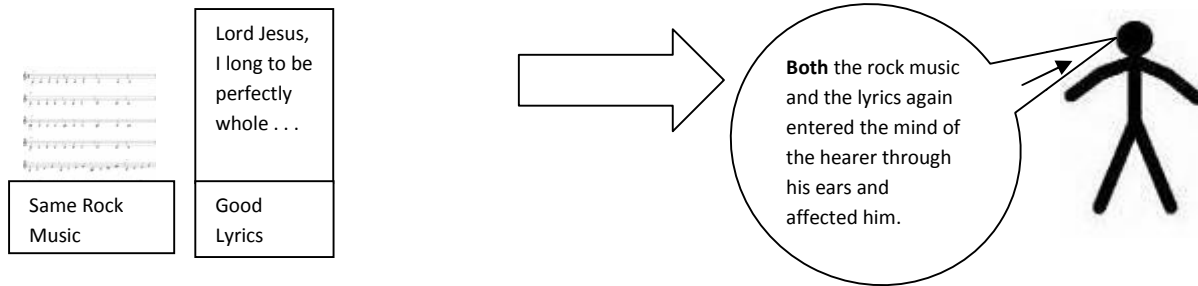
Why This Analogy Does Not Apply to the Debate about Musical Genres

The two diagrams below show why this analogy *does not* apply to musical genres. Here is what happened when rock music was first invented by evil people for evil purposes and then heard by people:



In this case, both the rock music and the lyrics entered the mind of the hearer and affected him.

Here is what happened when the first CCM song was heard by people:



As these two diagrams show, in the case of both rock music with evil lyrics and “Christian rock,” both the music and the lyrics enter the mind of the hearer and affect him. This is unlike what happened in the original scenario above with the sharpening tool and the knives and picks because the sharpening tool did not come into direct contact with the entity that the sharpened knives and picks affected.

This analysis shows that this “thought experiment” does not correspond to what happened with rock music with evil lyrics versus rock music with Christian lyrics. This argument does not prove that “Christian rap” and “Christian rock” are legitimate uses of a tool that is an inherently neutral or even moral vehicle used to deliver good lyrics.

The argument about the sharpening tool, etc. also does not show that an argument from the evil origins of rock music is fallacious. The two examples are not analogous—they differ crucially.

¹ In a comment made on December 18, 2013 at 3:40 pm; available at <http://religiousaffections.org/articles/articles-on-culture/discussion-about-christian-rap-with-shai-linne-example-of-sinful-music-rebuttal/>.