

Common Ground Part 2: The Standard of Evaluation

The question of what "common ground" Christian believers share with non-believers is of great concern within presuppositional apologetics. It often seems that the believer has a vested interest in distinguishing himself from non-believers, who are often viewed with contempt, so as not to be lumped into the same group on a cosmic or supernatural level. Perhaps this fear is motivated by the supposition that, if the believer looks and acts too much like non-believers, he may inherit the same fate as non-believers. So in his mind, he wants to amplify differences and suppress similarities. Hence the issue of 'common ground' needs its orthodox spin in order to stave off such fears. But are believers and non-believers really so radically different from each other as apologists seem to think?

My view is that believers and non-believers have a lot in common, and much of what they have in common is often ignored by apologists bent on magnifying differences for the sake of division. Much to the chagrin of presuppositionalism's champions, the commonality between believers and non-believers in fact underscores a rational and therefore non-theistic worldview.

As readers of the [first installment](#) in this series will recall, the questions about 'common ground' posed by a presuppositional apologist were the following:

1. What do believers and unbelievers, if they share anything at all, have in common?
2. **How is this common ground to be evaluated?**
3. What is shared/unshared metaphysically?
4. What is shared/unshared epistemologically?
5. What is shared/unshared ethically?
6. In what ways can believers and unbelievers cooperate with one another intellectually/socially/politically?
7. What consequences do those matters that divide Christian and non-Christian have for how Christians are to do philosophy?

In the present installment, I will focus on the second question. I have already addressed the first question [here](#), and I will address the remaining questions in future installments to my blog.

Question 2: How is this common ground to be evaluated?

Answer: Once the common characteristics between believers and non-believers have been identified (which I have done [here](#)), they should be evaluated *objectively*. By 'evaluate' I'm assuming the questioner means *identify the significance of those common characteristics by examining them in a specific context*. An *objective* evaluation is one which consistently bears in mind the facts that reality exists independent of consciousness, that the task of consciousness is to identify facts as opposed to "creating" them out of nothing, and that the imaginary cannot serve as a substitute for the real.

The context in which I evaluate these common characteristics is in terms of man's life and the values he needs in order to live, which may or may not be the context that the author of these questions had in mind. For instance, the fact that man is a biological organism is significant because it is his nature as a biological organism which makes all these other characteristics possible to discuss. As we saw in my response to the first question, man (whether he believes in Christianity or not) differs from the Christian god in that his life is *conditional*. It is because man is a biological organism that he faces a fundamental alternative: to live or die. Rocks are not biological organisms, so they do not face this fundamental alternative. It is because man faces this alternative that values are both possible and necessary for his life, since values supply what he needs in order to exist and provide an objective guide for chosen action. Additionally, it is because of the unique kind of consciousness that man possesses as a biological organism that he is able to identify those values which his life requires as well as the actions he needs to take in order to achieve them. And so on.

What is important to note is that one's religious beliefs are *irrelevant* to these facts: no matter what a man believes about the nature or origin of the universe, about "life after death," or about other religious claims, he remains a biological organism and continues to face the fundamental alternative of life vs. death. What we believe will not change these facts. To suggest otherwise is to embrace [subjectivism](#).

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Common Ground](#)

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[Francois Tremblay](#) said...

As usual, I follow this series with attention. Good work.

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