

Common Ground Part 3: Metaphysics

This post continues my consideration of seven questions regarding the issue of "common ground" posed by a presuppositional apologist to the [All-Bahnsen List](#) in February 2005. Those questions are:

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 third question. I have already dealt with the first question [here](#), and the second one [here](#). The remaining questions will be answered in separate blog entries.

Question 3: What do believers and non-believers share in regard to metaphysics?

Answer: Generally speaking, I don't think there is any fundamental metaphysical difference between believers and non-believers. As I mentioned in response to the second question, believing a claim will not change one's fundamental nature or the fact that one must act in order to live. This point is mentioned in keeping with [the primacy of existence metaphysics](#). Believers make use of this principle (for instance, one Christian [commented](#) as follows: "Can every other worldview claim to account for ["transcendentals"]? Yes, of course they can CLAIM this, but *that doesn't make it so.*"), but they cannot account for it on the basis of their own worldview's explicit teachings, which insist on the primacy of consciousness. To make such statements, believers must borrow from an objective and therefore non-theistic worldview, thus implicitly rejecting their professed theism.

Both believers and non-believers are biological organisms, and both are powerless to change this. Some believers might like to think that their ontology has been "enhanced" in some way due to what they believe (cf. [II Cor. 5:17](#)), but I know of no reason to accept this as truth. Simply believing a claim is not sufficient to change our natures into something they aren't. In other words, if I choose to believe, as the Lahu tribesmen believe, that Geusha is the supreme being of the universe, doing so will not exempt me from my need for food and shelter from the elements.

Some believers seem to believe that, because they believe in a god, they will escape death. But any glance at a cemetery will give one an eyeful of crosses lined up in neat little rows, each representing a deceased somebody, many of whom claimed to believe in the Christian god. And yet, there they lie. The cross has always been a fitting symbol of death. Of course, believers might then claim that upon death, their 'souls' will go to a place called "Heaven." Thus they admit that they do not really expect to escape death, but hope to find paradise in death, a blissful existence in non-existence, essentially seeking eternal contentment in diametric contradiction.

Now anyone can *imagine* these things, but imagining them does not make them real. "Heaven" is a place that 'exists' only in the believer's imagination, and his hope to journey to this magic kingdom cannot give any value to life on earth because ultimately it undercuts any value one might put on his earthly life. The belief that life is eternally abundant when in fact it is brief and delicate, can only cheapen any value one puts on life in the here and now. So merely holding a belief will not change the biological nature of our being. And believing in an afterlife will not make an afterlife so. To affirm otherwise is to endorse [subjectivism](#).

Metaphysically, believers and non-believers, whether they like it or not, share the same fundamental orientation between their consciousness and the objects they perceive or consider. The believer's consciousness does not

create or alter reality any more than does the non-believer's. Only non-believers *can* be consistently honest about this fact, since believers affirm a worldview premised on the opposite principle: that reality or the universe or the world as such is a creation of consciousness, that a supernatural consciousness "controls whatsoever comes to pass" (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 160). Thus subjectivism is inescapable for the believer, so long as he affirms his religious worldview, and this simply sets him at odds with the reality in which he actually lives.

by Dawson Bethrick

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