

Common Ground Part 6: Cooperation

The questions were asked, and I answered them:

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 sixth question. Prior questions have already been addressed: [first](#), [second](#), [third](#), [fourth](#), [fifth](#). The remaining question will be addressed in my next installment.

Question 6: In what ways can believers and unbelievers cooperate with one another intellectually/socially/politically?

Answer: It is only to the extent that a believer does *not* take his religious teachings seriously and does *not* attempt to put them into practice consistently, that he will be able to cooperate with others, even other believers. A person whose worldview prostitutes itself by denying man's right to exist for his own sake, will find that cooperation with others is at best a fleeting fancy. When others do not conform to his wishes and commands, nothing will keep him from resorting to force to get others to comply. Assent to the fantasies of the religious worldview is of paramount importance to the committed believer, and those who do not so assent make themselves targets for the believer's contempt. A worldview which builds its moral theory on the premise that man has a duty to obey someone else's whims, will produce men who seek to rule others through the use of force. And history attests to causal relationship between mysticism, which entails the premise that some minds are supernaturally superior to others, and the use of force. We have learned these lessons all too well:

Faith in the supernatural begins as faith in the superiority of others. (Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*)

Faith and force... are corollaries: every period of history dominated by mysticism, was a period of statism, of dictatorship, of tyranny." (Rand, "Faith and Force: Destroyers of the Modern World," *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, p. 66)

Have you ever had a co-worker who always thought he was right and that everyone else is wrong? Was it ever easy to cooperate with this individual? Or was it difficult? What if that co-worker could not defend his position reasonably, but instead insisted that everyone just "have faith" in what he said? What would it take to "cooperate" with that individual if not a complete suspension of your own rationality? When someone holds a gun to your head and you do what he says because you're afraid that he will pull the trigger if you disobey him, are the two of you really "cooperating"? If one is willing to cooperate, he does not need to be forced at gunpoint.

In addition, then, to willingness to work together towards a common goal, cooperation requires among other things a presumption of political equality, if only implicitly. But a presumption of political equality is difficult to sustain when one party to the cooperative effort numbers himself among "the chosen" and his colleague(s) among "the damned." The intolerance that is fostered by religious teaching is a sure recipe for division and animosity rather than cooperation and common goals. What political equality can be enjoyed among "the chosen" and "the damned"? Do believers want to cooperate with non-believers? Why would they want to? Aren't non-believers "of the Devil"? Are they not despised by the invisible magic being that they worship and hope to please? And how is someone who is committed to reason going to be able to cooperate with those who believe in invisible magic

beings, unless the latter put aside their childish beliefs and behave as rational adults?

Cooperation among individuals depends on how consistently all parties involved embrace *reason*. A firm commitment to reason as one's only means of knowledge and his only guide to action is a necessary condition for sustained mutual cooperation among individuals. So long as all parties are willing to deal with each other rationally and put aside contentious differences, mutual cooperation will be possible in intellectual, social and political spheres. This essentially means that believers would have to put away their enmity and resentment for non-believers and govern their choices and actions as if their god-beliefs were not true. For, as should be clear, their worldview is far from rational. Cooperation depends on mutual trust, but any opportunity for mutual trust is undermined by what Christianity teaches. Christians are not going to be able to trust those whom they deem to be "of the devil," and non-Christians are hardly going to be able to trust those who condemn them simply for not believing Christianity's subjective proclamations. Mutual trust requires the choice to deal with others rationally. Rationality is the commitment to reason as one's only means of knowledge and his only guide to action. But Christianity condemns such commitment as too selfish, too autonomous, too unconcerned with the dictates of the supernatural. The alternative to a commitment to reason, however, is the choice to compromise reason, to evade truth, to fake reality. This choice will, if unchecked, naturally lead to the willingness to resort to the initiation of force against others when one does not get his way, or to stand by and "turn the cheek" when others employ force. And while the bible nowhere prohibits the initiation of the use of force against others, it also explicitly commands believers to "resist not evil" (Mt. 5:39), so that evil can have its merry way. If they are obedient to this commandment, Christians cannot be counted on to rise up against those who desire to do injustice to them or to anyone else. How can such be trusted as a friend?

If the Christian finds that he needs to cooperate with non-believers, most likely he will find plenty who are willing. But the believer's own worldview may very well cause unneeded problems if he seeks to interject it into the mix. If nothing else, Christianity seeks to divide men rather than unite them. It seeks to instill distrust in believers for "the world" which is thought to be populated by Satan's puppets who need to be evangelized or shunned. II Corinthians 6:14 warns the believer explicitly on this:

Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness?

Although there are exceptions, non-believers are very often quite tolerant of other people and their differences, so long as they do not infringe on an individual's rights. At the very least, non-believers are not monolithically committed to a worldview which sees outsiders as a threat. A worldview which perceives outsiders as inherently threatening stacks the deck against mutual cooperation, and often fosters a cult-like mentality. If taken seriously, Christianity's division of men into opposing collectives will only undermine any opportunity in which believer and non-believer can work together.

This of course suggests that any time a believer cooperates with non-believers in some joint venture, he may very well not be taking Christianity's divisive teachings very seriously. After all, why would a believer, who is commanded to come out from among those of the world and "be separate" from them (cf. II Cor. 6:17), be willing to join a sports team, accept a job or enter a business contract when doing so will align him with nasty non-believers? Why would a believer accept payment from non-believing customers when they are said to be "dead in their sins" (Eph. 2:1-5) and condemned as wicked enemies of Christ? What exactly is so "wrong" about not believing anyway? If a man is honest to himself and recognizes that he does not believe, do believers think he should lie and say he believes anyway? Do believers have the kind of character that would prefer men to lie and say they believe, or to be honest and openly admit that they think Christianity is nonsense? Or, do believers prefer a policy of "don't ask - don't tell" when it comes to interacting with non-believers on the job, in the marketplace or at the sports bar?

by Dawson Bethrick

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1 Comments:

[Zachary Moore](#) said...

Dawson-

Thanks so much for this series. I've been looking forward to this particular entry since you began it, and am very interested to read your concluding remarks

-Z

[March 20, 2007 7:35 AM](#)