

A RESPONSE TO CRITICS OF CLARITY

Common Ground Applied to Avoid Meaningless Disputes

Part I: The Necessity for Common Ground

Common Ground (CG) is the set of conditions necessary for thought and discourse. To engage in discourse without CG is to engage in meaningless disputes.

CG consists of the following:

1. Reason as the laws of thought (identity, non-contradiction and excluded middle) is the test for meaning and is self-attesting.
2. Integrity is a commitment to reason as a concern for consistency.
3. Rational Presuppositionalism (RP) affirms the necessity to address the more basic before the less basic.
4. The Principle of Clarity (PC) affirms: some things are clear; the basic things are clear; the basic things concerning metaphysics (about God and man) and ethics (about good and evil) are clear to reason—epistemology.

For skeptics, to deny CG is to deny any possibility of knowledge, which is self-referentially absurd. For theists, to deny clarity is to deny inexcusability (of unbelief) and the need for redemptive revelation.

Part II: Objections to Common Ground and Responses

The following objections deny Common Ground. A response is made to each objection.

Objection 1: Being can come from non-being. Since laws do not apply to non-being, no law *ontologically* prevents being coming from non-being.

Response: If being can come from non-being, then there is *logically* no way to distinguish being from non-being. It is a meaningless distinction. Since being and non-being is the most basic distinction, then all other distinctions resting on this are meaningless. If all words are meaningless, then all thought and discourse end.

Objection 2: We cannot know *a is a*; we may have an incorrigible memory lapse (fallibilism). Yet the claim *a is a* is probably true.

Response: If there is no rational basis for certainty (re: *a is a*), there is no rational basis for certainty about anything, including probability.

Objection 3: *a is a* is pragmatically true, not logically true.

Response:

- i. Can the logical contradiction (*a is not a*) be possibly true in any sense? If it makes no sense, then it is necessarily false and its contradiction (*a is a*) is necessarily true, not just pragmatically true.
- ii. What is pragmatically true is about “what works for me,” or “what I like.” Expressions of feelings are non-cognitive (neither true nor false) and not subject to discussion.

Objection 4: Nothing (including reason) is self-attesting, therefore nothing is certain.

Response: Pure skepticism is self-referentially absurd (SRA): is it certain that nothing is certain? Or, can any degree of certainty (probability) be distinguished with certainty?

Objection 5: Fideism: reason is not self-attesting; only Scripture is self-attesting.

Response:

- i. Which, of many, is the self-attesting true Scripture?
- ii. Why is there need for any Scripture?
- iii. Which interpretation of Scripture is self-attesting?
- iv. SR *requires* cGR and reason; and cGR *requires* SR.
- v. Any thought requires reason as the laws of thought.
- vi. Scripture is the Word of God *written*. (From SR) the Word of God is in all men *first* as light, that is, reason.
- vii. Since reason is self-attesting, (from SR) it would be the Word of God as reason that is self-attesting.

Objection 6: Reason is not self-attesting; only God is. (“When God speaks, you know”—affirmed in existential theology and in simple piety).

Response:

- i. No experience is meaningful without interpretation; and every interpretation must be tested for meaning (by reason).
- ii. The experience of regeneration is not self-attesting; it may not be known by oneself if one has had the experience.
- iii. Many make the claim that “God spoke to me,” which claims contradict each other.
- iv. Since reason applies to the being of God (God is not both eternal and not eternal, at the same time and in the same respect), God cannot contradict himself. Miracles do not contradict reason, which is uncreated, but transcend the laws of nature, which are created.

Objection 7: The simple pious cannot be expected to know these things.

Response:

- i. All can know what is clear; all can know foundational (grammar level) truths; all can grow to maturity.
- ii. It is not a matter of learning, but of seeking. Left to oneself, no one (learned or unlearned) seeks God.
- iii. All suffer under the curse (of toil, strife, and old age, sickness and death), therefore all are being called to seek.

Objection 8: Higher Consciousness (“HC”) goes beyond reason.

Response:

- i. God’s being is rational (not both eternal and not eternal, st/sr); God’s “HC” is not beyond his rational being.
- ii. If “HC” goes beyond the laws of thought, it makes no assertion (it isn’t is; it isn’t isn’t; it isn’t both; it isn’t neither). “HC” moves to silence.
- iii. “HC” without reason cannot distinguish itself from lower consciousness or no consciousness.
- iv. Only reason by RP can achieve the higher consciousness of unity of diversity.

Objection 9: If you can get *a* from *non-a*, you can get being from non-being.

Response:

- i. A particular form of being is not identical with all of being (being as such).
- ii. It is not chicken (*a*) from the egg (*non-a*), but being (both chicken and egg—both *a* and *non-a*) from non-being.

Objection 10: You can get being from non-being, in quantum physics or in creation *ex nihilo*.

Response:

- i. Quantum foam is not particle physics, but (like energy) it is not non-being.
- ii. God the Creator is Spirit, not matter, but Spirit is not non-being.

Objection 11: To every argument an equal argument can be opposed. Therefore, judgment is suspended and mental tranquility is achieved (Sextus Empiricus).

Response:

- i. *Some is eternal* is not equal in rationality to *none is eternal* (that is, all came into being from non-being).
- ii. Because *being from non-being* is meaningless (necessarily false, false in every possible world), *some is eternal* is necessarily true, and maximally clear, and certain.

Objection 12: There are uncaused events (Epicurus—the atomic swerve/*clinamen* theory).

Response:

- i. If an uncaused event could happen once, it could happen more than once, perhaps often or always.
- ii. There is no way empirically to distinguish a caused from an uncaused event.
- iii. If thoughts can be uncaused events, then uncaused thoughts making distinctions about cause become rationally meaningless.
- iv. Talk about uncaused events is therefore SRA.
- v. SRA's are non-starters—they end thought and discourse before they begin.

Objection 13: Reason cannot get you very far beyond *a is a*.

Response:

- i. Reason is *first* the test for meaning. What violates a law of thought lacks meaning; a meaningless statement cannot be true, but is necessarily false (by *reductio ad absurdum*).
- ii. The contradiction of what is necessarily false *must* be true.
- iii. We can know by reason that there *must* be something eternal and that *only* some is eternal; we can know by reason that the good for a being is according to the nature of that being.
- iv. Therefore, the basic things about God and man and good and evil are clear to reason (PC).
- v. The Principle of Clarity has substantial content that can be extended by the Principle of Rational Presuppositionalism, both of which are affirmed in Common Ground.

(Part II to be continued as further objections arise)

Part III: Summary

1. Neither skepticism nor fideism can set aside reason.
2. Critics of clarity try to set aside reason to avoid discussion, which shows the inexcusability of unbelief.
3. The light of reason is irresistible: it cannot be overcome and it cannot be withstood.
4. Reason in man (made in the image of God) cannot be eradicated from human nature.
5. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not (John 1:5). Reason is self-attesting.