COMMON GROUND

The Necessary Condition for Thought and Discourse

1. Common Ground

i. Common Ground (CG) is the set of epistemologically necessary conditions for thought and discourse. Without CG words are emptied of meaning; what is meaningless, due to lack of CG, is absurd. To deny CG is to deny the possibility of public discourse.

ii. CG is necessary to avoid foolish arguments (what cannot be resolved because no basis for resolution is in place). A foolish argument only causes strife.

iii. Avoiding foolish arguments is not optional; it is an imperative. Not avoiding foolish arguments would be epistemologically foolish, mistaken, a blunder, inept and unwise. What is foolish falls into the category of moral evil (denying human nature as rational), and its inherent consequence.

iv. To avoid foolish arguments means both that there is no rational obligation to respond and there is a rational obligation not to respond, where a lack of CG is observed.

v. To avoid foolish arguments, all that needs to be said is: there is no CG in place; or, the other person does not affirm the objective content of the principle of CG. This needs to be said, and nothing more.

vi. CG affirms: reason as the laws of thought; integrity as a concern for consistency; Rational Presuppositionalism as critical thinking applied consistently; and the Principle of Clarity as necessary for meaning and morality. Each of the above is explained below.

vii. CG cannot consistently be denied. There is no naked public square (no public discourse devoid of CG); but one can be naked in the public square.

2. Reason

i. It is self-evident that we think: we form concepts, judgments and arguments expressed in words, sentences and syllogisms.

ii. It is self-evident that there are laws of thought and that these laws are the laws of identity, non-contradiction and excluded middle. These laws of thought are the laws of reason.

iii. Reason as the laws of thought makes thought possible. To use reason to question reason is self-referentially absurd (SRA).

iv. Reason as the laws of thought is the test for meaning, which is necessary for truth. Reason is not neutral with respect to truth. What violates a law of thought lacks meaning and cannot be true. Common Ground is not neutral ground.

v. Reason as the laws of thought is most basic in epistemology. It is transcendental, self-attesting and the most basic authority.

vi. Reason is ontological: it applies to being as well as thought. There are no square-circles, no uncaused events, no being from non-being. What is logically impossible does not exist in any possible world.

vii. Reason is natural, not conventional, the same in all who think. Reason is fundamental since what we think is basic to what we desire and what we choose to do.
3. Integrity

i. CG in reason requires a commitment to reason. A commitment to reason is a concern for consistency, both logical (vs. *reductio ad absurdum*) and existential (vs. *self-referential absurdity*—SRA).

ii. The concern for consistency in thought, word and deed is integrity. Integrity is not sincerity, which confuses deep feeling with knowledge and uses words without cognitive meaning.

iii. Integrity is opposed to hypocrisy, which lacks concern for consistency. Hypocrisy gives appearance in place of reality.

iv. We are more or less conscious and consistent; we should be more conscious and consistent. We should use reason to examine our basic beliefs (*presuppositions*) for meaning.

v. Persuasion by pseudo-arguments is opposed to proof by sound arguments. Use of informal fallacies gives the appearance of reason in the place of reason itself.

vi. Judging by false or irrelevant standards gives the appearance of knowledge, but not knowledge itself. One may appear to have insight yet lack sight.

vii. Examining the beliefs of others without allowing examination of one’s own beliefs gives only the appearance of integrity, which is hypocrisy.

4. Rational Presuppositionalism

i. Integrity requires critical thinking (CT). CT consistently applied uses reason to test basic beliefs (*presuppositions*) for meaning. *This level of CT is called rational presuppositionalism* (RP) in order to distinguish it from other levels and uses of reason and other epistemologies.

ii. RP maintains that we think of the less basic in light of the more basic; that if we agree on the more basic we will agree on the less basic; that to be concerned with the less basic before the more basic is a denial of the principle of RP and therefore of CG.

iii. RP is first to be applied in general, the less basic in light of the more basic (* / = in light of*):

meaning/reason; truth/meaning; experience/basic belief; finite and temporal/infinite and eternal; conclusion/premises.

iv. RP is applied to giving proofs in philosophy: in epistemology first, then in metaphysics, and then in ethics. This will avoid interminable disputes persisting over millennia.

v. RP is applied to the order of understanding in theology: clarity of General Revelation first, then Scripture, and then Historic Christianity. In Scripture: Creation first, then the Fall, and then Redemption; the Old Testament, then the New Testament; Genesis, then Revelation. RP applied in hermeneutics affirms contextualism vs. literalism and allegoricalism. Likewise, the cumulative insight of Historic Christianity (from councils, in creeds) is opposed to dogmatic authority (based on mere tradition or appeal to individuals as authorities).

vi. Since no experience is meaningful without interpretation, the authority of reason in RP is opposed to the authority of experience assumed in tradition, common sense, testimony, intuition and science (*if* it claims that *all* knowledge is *only* from *sense* experience).

vii. RP is opposed to rationalism (reasoning without RP), as well as to skepticism (nothing is clear), and to fideism (belief without proof based on understanding).
5. The Principle of Clarity

i. CG in Reason, Integrity and RP, taken cumulatively, requires the Principle of Clarity (PC).

ii. PC states: some things are clear; the basic things are clear; the basic things (about God and man and good and evil) are clear to reason.

iii. Some things are clear. It is clear that the contradiction of "some things are clear" is "nothing is clear." If nothing is clear, then no distinction is meaningful (reductio ad absurdum). If no meaning is possible (nihilism), then thought and talk must be given up, which is self-referentially absurd (SRA). Therefore, it must be the case that "some things are clear."

iv. The basic things are clear. Thinking is presuppositional: we think of the less basic in light of the more basic (RP). If basic things are not clear, then nothing is clear (which is necessarily false by reductio and SRA). Therefore, basic things are clear.

v. The basic things (about God and man and good and evil) are clear to reason. The basic things are about metaphysics (God and man) and ethics (good and evil). Reason as the laws of thought is most basic. Therefore, the basic things are clear to reason (epistemology).

vi. PC is opposed to both skepticism and fideism. Skepticism divides mankind and then seeks to unite by relativism and political correctness (pc). PC is opposed to pc. Fideism divides mankind and then seeks to unite by authoritarian dogmatism. PC is opposed to dogmatism.

vii. To deny PC is to deny clarity and inexcusability, which denies the possibility of moral evil (sin and death) and mankind’s need for redemption. It is to deny the Logos in all men as reason and the Logos incarnate for all men.