

Finding the presuppositions in different world views

1- Materialism/Naturalism

“You can not show me God. Everything I come into contact with is material. All of it is made up of atoms, and molecules, and is testable, visible, takes up space, and is observable in some manner. Because it is material, I can test it. How can you test God’s existence in he is not material? How can you know that he is there for sure? I believe that everything that exists is part of the material world.”

2- Post modernism

“As I have said on many occasions, there is no such thing as truth, but only various opinions. In saying this, however, I do not mean to say that truth does not exist, but only that we cannot *know* that it exists. What we *can* know -- or at least what we can have a *strong opinion about* -- is that men's opinions often converge, and that *such convergence makes it convenient to say that we have "discovered some truth" at the point of convergence*; and it was precisely this which I meant when I once stated that "Truth is the asymptote of opinion". I hasten to point out, however, that the fact that men's opinions often converge is not sufficient to prove the existence of truth, or even *a* truth, for men's opinions once converged in agreeing to the truth of the proposition that the world is flat, and yet most men would not now say that such a proposition is (or was ever) true.”

3- Rationalism

“I don’t need a God to find the answers. Through my own reasoning abilities and the use of logic I can come to understand and know what the answers are. God is for the weak, lazy, and stupid.”

Mommy, Where Do Stupid Beliefs Come From?

In a recent online discussion, a question was posed which has, I'm sure, occurred to many atheists and freethinkers:

"Why do religious people believe the things they do? How can a person go through life on 'faith,' in light of mountains of evidence that suggest otherwise?"

There are many reasons that I can think of but intellectual laziness and stupidity are, surprise, not even the primary ones.

In a Skeptical Inquirer article called "Why Bad Beliefs Don't Die" by Gregory W. Lester, this issue was approached, with the phenomenon of belief considered as a brain function that aids survival.

For instance, to paraphrase part of the article, if a cave man is able to believe that a sabertooth tiger is probably waiting to attack him in the forest, despite all lack of sensory data or evidence, he will be more careful, and thus is more likely to survive. We use belief as a way of knowing, and it is independent of fact and evidence. If all we had was sensory data and observed empirical facts, it would be difficult to function. It might be impossible to make decisions in which one didn't have enough hard data.

The primary survival function of belief is to give useful "knowledge" in the absence of sensory data or fact, and even despite contradictory data. It's helpful, even necessary. We all have beliefs, and we use the ability to believe every day. Beliefs can provide comfort, a sense of certainty, a satisfactory explanation where no facts are known yet, and give us confidence. So what's the problem?

The problem is that beliefs can also be untruthful baloney, and even dangerous. The belief that your car is still where you parked it last night is a safe and rational belief, based on experience and reason - but the belief in an eternal magical "afterlife" of extreme reward or extreme punishment (depending on whether you "obey" and keep your faith or not) is not rational. It is not based on reason, but rather on desire and fear. And it can lead to danger as well...

Religion often teaches followers that maintaining belief is the most important value - in other words, not truth, not honesty, not critical thought. "Keeping the faith" is top priority. So the value of maintaining a rational, truthful perception of reality, which we hold to be a supreme value (I hope the reader agrees), is quietly placed on the back burner by religion.

By way of illustration of this trend, I've never heard a preacher admonish the congregation to rely on methods of rational evaluation and logic when reading scripture, or when deciding whether a claim is true or not. I've never heard a message from the

pulpit like "use your God-given abilities of reason and rational investigation in all things, even your beliefs" (and I've heard many hundreds of sermons). The old saying "all truth is God's truth" is hardly heard at all. When evaluating information, the advice of religious authorities usually seems to be something about "following where the Spirit leads" or "listening to the still, small voice of God in your heart," or they advise you to "study the scriptures, and God will show you the answer," and so on. Leaving lots of room for any number of influences, which are easily interpreted how one pleases.

Verses about "lean not on your own understanding" or the foolishness of "man's wisdom" (which is often used to mean "science") are popular and repeated among Christians with nods of agreement. The few verses about not "bearing false witness" or "speaking the truth in all things" are less popular.

But the value of truth is universal and simply evident, so why doesn't appeal to truth sway them? I would guess that, since religionists did not arrive at their belief by methods of reason or rational evaluation of evidence, those things will not shake their belief either...

Questions-

1- How does the author think he arrives at his beliefs?

2- What is the authors definition of belief as opposed to knowledge?

3- Does the author use the belief he so hates? In what way?

Inheriting Religion

As a Darwinian, something strikes me when I look at religion.

Religion shows a pattern of heredity which I think is similar to genetic heredity. The vast majority of people have an allegiance to one particular religion. There are hundreds of different religious sects, and every religious person is loyal to just one of those.

Out of all of the sects in the world, we notice an uncanny coincidence: the overwhelming majority just happen to choose the one that their parents belong to. Not the sect that has the best evidence in its favor, the best miracles, the best moral code, the best cathedral, the best stained glass, the best music: when it comes to choosing from the smorgasbord of available religions, their potential virtues seem to count for nothing, compared to the matter of heredity.

This is an unmistakable fact; nobody could seriously deny it. Yet people with full knowledge of the arbitrary nature of this heredity, somehow manage to go on believing in *their* religion, often with such fanaticism that they are prepared to murder people who follow a different one.

Truths about the cosmos are true all around the universe. They don't differ in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Poland, or Norway. Yet, we are apparently prepared to accept that the religion we adopt is a matter of an accident of geography.

If you ask people why they are convinced of the truth of their religion, they don't appeal to heredity. Put like that it sounds too obviously stupid. Nor do they appeal to evidence.

There isn't any, and nowadays the better educated admit it.

No, they appeal to faith. Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.

The worst thing is that the rest of us are supposed to respect it: to treat it with kid gloves.

If a slaughter man doesn't comply with the law in respect of cruelty to animals, he is rightly prosecuted and punished. But if he complains that his cruel practices are necessitated by religious faith, we back off apologetically and allow him to get on with it. Any other position that someone takes up can expect to be defended with reasoned argument. Faith is allowed not to justify itself by argument. Faith must be respected; and if you don't respect it, you are accused of violating human rights.

Even those with no faith have been brainwashed into respecting the faith of others. When so-called Muslim community leaders go on the radio and advocate the killing of Salman

Rushdie, they are clearly committing incitement to murder--a crime for which they would ordinarily be prosecuted and possibly imprisoned. But are they arrested? They are not, because our secular society "respects" their faith, and sympathises with the deep "hurt" and "insult" to it.

Well I don't. I will respect your views if you can justify them. but if you justify your views only by saying you have faith in them, I shall not respect them.

Richard Dawkins

<http://www.positiveatheism.org/writ/dawkins2.htm#NULL>

Another Cup of Coffee

By Dr. Greg Bahnsen

According to Van Til, apologetics aims to defend the Christian faith by answering the variety of challenges leveled against it by unbelievers, thereby vindicating the Christian philosophy of life (worldview) over against all non-Christian philosophies of life (worldviews).

There is a large number of ways in which Christian truth-claims come under attack. They are challenged as to their meaningfulness. The possibility of miracles, revelation, and incarnation are questioned. Doubt is cast upon the deity of Christ or the existence of God. The historical or scientific accuracy of the Bible is attacked. Scriptural teaching is rejected for not being logically coherent. Conscious life following physical death, everlasting damnation, and a future resurrection are not readily accepted. The way of salvation is found disgusting or unnecessary. The nature of God and the way of salvation are falsified by heretical schools of thought. Competing religious systems are set over against Christianity. The ethics of Scripture is criticized. The psychological or political adequacy of Christianity is looked down upon.

These and many, many other lines of attack are directed against Biblical Christianity. It is the job of apologetics to refute them and demonstrate the truth of the Christian proclamation and worldview - to "*cast down reasonings and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God*" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Therefore, apologetics involves intellectual reasoning and argumentation. The loathing of such things in many quarters of the modern Christian community is unhealthy. Reasoning is not an unspiritual activity, and argument does not mean personal contentiousness.

There is a use of the mind and scholarly procedures which is indeed proud and ungodly - "*walking in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart*" (Ephesians 4:17-18). Nevertheless, Paul just as clearly affirms "*you did not so learn Jesus*" (vs. 20). Christians have been renewed in the spirit of their minds (vs. 23; cf. Colossians 3:10) and granted repentance "*unto the knowledge of the truth*" (1 Corinthians 2:25). "We have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16), in light of which we seek to develop a philosophy that is not patterned after worldly thinking and human traditions, but rather after Christ, "*in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are deposited*" (Colossians 2:3, 8).

Reasoning in this manner is an expression of true spirituality and godliness, and obedient response to God's requirement that in "*whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God*" (1 Corinthians 10:31)

and that we "*love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind*" (Matthew 22:37). God does not want our minds eradicated, but transformed (Romans 12:2).

When we begin to use our intellects in the service of our Creator and Savior, we will naturally wish to do so with the best efforts and quality available. It is obvious in the pages of the New Testament that this was the case for the disciples, whether they were fishermen, tax-collectors, or studious teachers of the law. They put their minds to work - searching God's word for better understanding and reasoning with people to persuade them of its truth.

Yet they knew the difference between intellectual argument - the presentation of premises or reasons in support of an inference or conclusion, the offering of evidence to substantiate claims - and the interpersonal spirit of hostility or contention. Thus Peter, aware of different ways and argument can be conducted, specifically reminded his readers to offer their reasoned defense "*with gentleness and respect*" (1 Peter 3:15). Paul wrote: "the Lord's bondservant must not quarrel, but gentle toward all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting those who oppose themselves" (2 Timothy 2:24).

This does not mean giving even an inch on the issues of truth over which we disagree with the unbeliever. But it does mean, as Dr. Van Til would always say, that we keep buying the next cup of coffee for our "opponent."