

SPECULATION VS. FACTUALITY

An Analysis of Modern Unbelief and a Suggested Corrective

(The Patrick Henry College Faith & Reason Lecture, Fall, 2010)

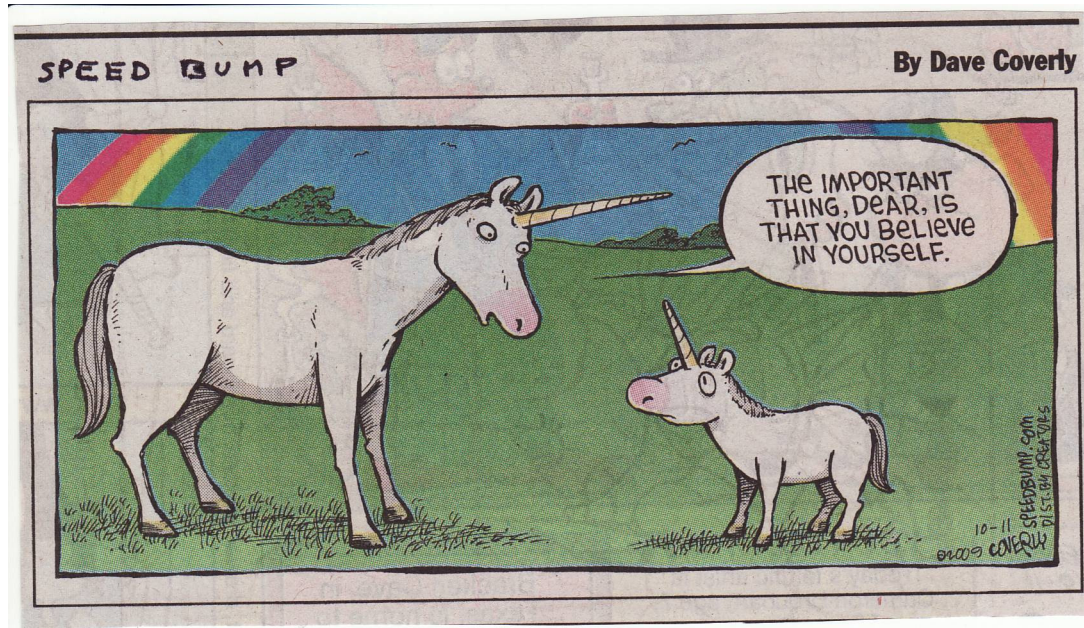
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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are facts really all that plain? Can't one person's "facts" be another person's "fantasies"?
2. If the Bible is all that clear, why are there so many churches and denominations?
3. The Bible contains parables, dreams, and poetry. How can we say that it must be "taken literally"?
4. What is irrational about a non-Christian's interpreting the world from his/her starting-point? As Cornelius Van Til said, "All is yellow to the jaundiced eye. As he [the Christian] speaks of the facts the sinner reports them to himself and others as yellow every one. There are no exceptions to this. And it is the facts as reported to himself, that is as distorted by his own subjective condition, which he assumes to be the facts as they really are."
5. Does not the fact that we always approach the world from our own personal stance destroy the lecturer's argument that it is vital to maintain a clear separation between subject and object?
6. Edwin A. Burt wrote a classic entitled, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science*. If the physical sciences have "metaphysical foundations," does it not follow that science is based on belief and not on fact?
7. In literature, are there not as many interpretations of, say, James Joyce's *Ulysses* as there are readers of the book? Isn't the "meaning" of poetry or a painting whatever the individual reader or observer finds personally meaningful?
8. Why shouldn't we consider computers as having minds and being capable of thought? (After all, this would not be saying that "mind" can arise from non-mind, since it is human minds that conceive of, build, and program computers.)
9. Does the lecturer's view of interpretation as arriving at the best explanation that fits the facts contradict the traditional notion of "original intent" in interpreting, say, the U. S. Constitution?
10. What do you think Magritte was trying to say by way of his painting "This is not a pipe"?



11. What is the point of the cartoon with the mother and baby unicorn?



12. Do you agree that a consistently conservative acceptance of existing values has made it difficult for non-believers to become Christians? Can you cite examples? If this is a real problem, what can be done to remedy it?

13. What criteria should be used to distinguish genuine, God-given “Orders of Creation” from merely human structures? How should American government be classified? The Republican Party? The home schooling movement?

14. Do you agree with the lecturer’s contention that speculation has roots in sinful autonomy? From a biblical standpoint, is there any proper place for speculation, and, if so, where, and under what conditions and restraints?

15. What is your reaction to the following? “It is our destiny to redefine ourselves. In the world of the book, the truth is an immutable thing to be captured and recorded. But as the age of electronic information matures and the age of artificial intelligence commences, we recognize that we are on a journey and while we may question whether the next destination is better than the place we left, we realize that the journey is ours, for we must see what it is—that what we have made, makes us” (Myron E. Krueger, Foreword to Michael Heim, *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993]).

16. Do Christian believers themselves sometimes substitute speculation for dependence on God-given factuality? Can you think of specific areas, such as eschatology, where this occurs?

17. Do you agree that “positive thinking” and the prosperity gospel display a tendency in modern America to avoid factual reality, particularly among church people?

18. How can you help a non-Christian to recognize that he/she is substituting speculation for facticity in rejecting—or in not accepting—the claims of Christ? (*Hint*: Would that person be able to survive in ordinary life using the same kind of reasoning?)

19. Give illustrations to support (or to refute) Marcel Proust’s aphorism that “Any mental activity is easy if it need not take reality into account.”