

The Apologetic Import of the *Autopistia* of Scripture

“... in your light do we see light” (Ps. 36:9 –ESV)

Δός μοι ποῦ στῶ καί κινῶ τήν γήν – Archimedes¹

INTRODUCTION

In apologetic endeavors, the question of authority or the ground of knowledge is an important one. How can one know what is the truth? For a Christian, not only do we ponder over the question of how we can know what the truth is, but the question of how truth and Scripture relate to each other is equally pertinent.

In this paper, I would like to defend the thesis that the doctrine of *autopistia*² or the self-authenticating nature of Scripture substantiates the proper foundation or ground of knowledge which is the Scriptures themselves, and that this can be used profitably in the realm of apologetics. To this end, firstly, I will put forward the proposition that the foundation for the framework of all knowledge is the Scriptures themselves. Secondly, I would show how the doctrine of *autopistia* can be used to substantiate it. Thirdly, I would proceed from there to suggest a method to apply this fact in the realm of apologetics.

EPISTEMOLOGY AND PRESUPPOSITIONALISM

How does one come to know something, in fact anything at all? This is a question, probably the most important question, of epistemology, the philosophy of knowledge. For unless one has a certain way of knowing anything, how can one come to possess any knowledge? Empiricists

¹ “Give to me [a place] where I may stand [that is, where I may place my lever’s fulcrum, and a level long enough] and I will move the earth.” As stated in Robert L. Reymond, *Faith’s Reasons for Believing: An Apologetic Antidote to Mindless Christianity* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publishing, 2008), 7.

² From Greek αυτοπιστος (*autopistos*). In the Latin version of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (I.7.5), the cognate form αυτοπιστον is used of Scripture by John Calvin, as stated in Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd Ed. (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 80 footnote 45

ground knowledge in the senses and experiences, while Rationalists ground knowledge in the mind. The philosopher Immanuel Kant in his *The Critique of Pure Reason*³ distinguished between analytic knowledge (which is [rationally] by definition true) and synthetic knowledge (which consist of knowledge that is outside in the world),⁴ attempting to argue later for the idea of *a priori* synthetic knowledge. In the construction of his philosophy, Kant attempts to fuse elements from pure rationalism and empiricism in his “transcendental” epistemology. Later philosophers generally have either followed some form of Empiricism,⁵ Rationalism, a mixture of the two, or abandon the quest altogether for irrationality.⁶

Over and against the epistemologies of the world, Christianity has its own epistemology and ground of knowledge. In the twentieth century, the school known as Presuppositionalism was founded by the late theologian Cornelius Van Til⁷ and the philosopher Gordon Haddon Clark.⁸ Over and against empiricism and rationalism, presuppositionalism in both its Van Tillian form and its Clarkian form emphasized the necessity of revelation as being foundational for true knowledge. Consequently, both empiricism⁹ and rationalism¹⁰ are both critiqued not only as being unbiblical, but also in failing to achieve their lofty epistemological goals.¹¹

³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. As found in Diogenes Allen, ed. and Eric O. Springsted, ed., *Primary Readings in Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 172-209

⁴ *Ibid.*, 180

⁵ The logical positivists are for example the most hard-core empiricists around. The latest reincarnation of this philosophy in the New Atheists like Richard Dawkins has been very vocal in promoting their scientific empiricism. See for example Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London, UK: Transworld Publishers, 2006) for a contemporary if non-scholastic propagation of empirical positivism.

⁶ Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 115.

⁷ John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: Ana Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995), 131-137

⁸ W. Gary Crampton, *The Scripturalism of Gordon H. Clark* (Unicoi, Tennessee: Trinity Foundation, 1999). Although both were presuppositionalists, their respective systems differ in some aspects and the Clark-Van Til controversy in has created bad blood between followers of each system. For more regarding the controversy, see *Idem.*, 97-113. See also Herman Hoeksema, *The Clark-Van Til Controversy* (Uncoi, Tennessee: Trinity Foundation, 1995)

⁹ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987). On pages 117-118, Frame critiqued empiricism, stating:

The basis of true knowledge therefore is revelation. What then is the relation between knowledge and faith?

SCRIPTURE AS THE PRINCIPIUM COGNOSCENDI EXTERNUM

In Richard A. Muller's *magnum opus*, his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*,¹² the Protestant scholastics were said to have declared two principles of theology (*principia theologiae*). Revelation especially in the form of Scripture is called the *principium cognoscendi*,¹³ while God Himself is the *principium essendi*.¹⁴ Along these lines, philosopher and theologian K. Scott Oliphant states,¹⁵

(i) Empiricism cannot justify a general proposition, such as "all men are mortal..." Similarly, the propositions of logic and mathematics, propositions that claim to be universally true, cannot be established on an empirical basis. (ii) Empiricism cannot justify any statement about the future... (iii) ... empiricism cannot justify any statements about ethical values. Statements about sensible facts do not imply anything about ethical goodness or badness, right or wrong, or obligation or prohibition... (iv) Therefore empiricism cannot justify empiricism. For empiricism is a view of how one *ought* (an ethical "ought") to justify his beliefs, and on an empiricist basis, we cannot justify from sense-experience the proposition that we *ought* to justify our beliefs in that way.

[And, of course,] empiricism rules out claims to know God, if God is thought to be invisible or otherwise resistant to empirical "checking procedures"

Along the same line, Empiricism cannot actually refute Descartes' demon deluding humanity besides ridiculing it. A modern thought experiment is that of being "in the Matrix" (based upon the Matrix movie trilogy). Empiricism simply does not have the ability to refute such theories except by ridicule or denial.

In the case of science, see also Gordon H. Clark, *The Philosophy of Science and the Belief in God* (Unicoi, Tennessee: Trinity Foundation, 1996) for a rebuttal of the ability of autonomous science in and by itself to discover truth, especially as it addresses the logical fallacy of induction inherent in the scientific enterprise.

¹⁰ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 113. Frame critiques rationalism on page 113 as follows:

[We can] deduce very little from such a priori ideas. Certainly, we cannot deduce the whole fabric of human knowledge from them or even enough knowledge to constitute a meaningful philosophy. Nothing follows from the laws of logic, taken alone, except possibly more laws of logic. From propositions about our own mental states, nothing follows except further propositions about our own mental states. From the statement "there are objective truths," nothing specific follows, and a statement that tells us nothing specific... is not a meaningful statement... Thus if knowledge is limited to the sorts of propositions we have just examined, we will know only about our own minds and not about the real world because our mental states often deceive us. Thus rationalism leaves us not with the body of certainties that Plato and Descartes dreamed of but with no knowledge at all of the real world

¹¹ Crampton, 16-26

¹² Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, Vol. 1: Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker), 126-7

¹³ *Principium cognoscendi* roughly translated is the principle of knowing

The standard view in theology is that its *principium essendi* is God himself. He alone provides what is needed for us to understand him and his revelation to us. The *principium cognoscendi* is revelation itself.

Oliphant further distinguished between the *principium cognoscendi externum* (External principle of knowledge), which is “God’s special revelation in his Word”, and the *principium cognoscendi internum* (Internal principle of knowledge), which is “regenerate reason and Holy Spirit.”¹⁶

Scripture being the external principle of knowledge, it would thus seem that all of knowledge depends on and is undergirded by the truth of Scripture.¹⁷ While most assuredly Scripture is not a science textbook or a textbook on any other subject, what this means is not that all knowledge is found in Scripture, but that apart from Scripture, no knowledge can be known and justified as knowledge.¹⁸ As Oliphant later wrote, “Every philosophical position must rely on some outside source(s) of authority; a Christian position must rely on God’s revelation of himself in his Word.”¹⁹

¹⁴ *Principium essendi* roughly translated is the principle of being

¹⁵ K. Scott Oliphant, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey, Presbyterian and Reformed, 2006), 26

¹⁶ *Ibid.* In the article by Henk van den Belt, the similarities and differences of Old Amsterdam theologian Herman Bavinck and Old Princetonian theologian B.B. Warfield on the relation between the external and internal authority of faith is explored. Both men agreed on the authority of Scripture (*principium cognoscendi externum*) and the testimony of the Spirit (*principium cognoscendi internum*). However, they disagreed on the exact relation between the two. See Henk van den Belt, “Herman Bavinck and Benjamin B. Warfield on Apologetics and the Autopistia of Scripture,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no.1 (April 2010): 43

¹⁷ Although it is not possible to believe in the *principium cognoscendi externum* without the *principium cognoscendi internum*, the two are distinguishable and we will focus on the former.

¹⁸ Van Til in his book *In Defense of the Faith Volume 1: The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture* (Ripon, California: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1967), in pages 4-12 expounded on the topic of General or Nature Revelation. While it is true that General Revelation is intuitive in the heart (c.f. Rom. 1:19-20), precisely because it is intuitive, it cannot adequately function to justify any knowledge. General revelation is necessary and sufficient for God to indict men of unbelief, but it is insufficient on Man’s side as a basis for justifying any belief, much less prove it as true. It is just like the existence of men’s souls; such is self-evidently true but it cannot be conclusively proven apart from God’s special revelation. It is this confusion between General Revelation as sufficient for God and Man’s subjective knowing but insufficient for Man’s justification of knowledge on the one hand, and the confusion between General Revelation and the scientific enterprise as if they were equivalent on the other hand, that caused Van Til to misinterpret Gordon Clark on page 68 in this book of his.

¹⁹ Oliphant, 261

Also, with regards to these principles,

Principia were set forth, in the history of thought, generally, and of theology, more specifically, as those beginning points, indemonstrable in themselves, out of and by which one could think about and know reality. In that sense, they were fundamental to everything else that we could know.²⁰

Robert L. Reymond has succinctly expressed this presuppositionalist epistemology as follows:²¹

All this [*sic*] [non-Christian epistemologies] the Christian eschews in favor of the epistemology graciously given in the fact and propositional content of Holy Scripture. He recognizes that in the fact of Scripture itself he has a truly profound solution to man's need for an infinite reference point if knowledge is to become a reality. He understands that because there is comprehensive knowledge with God, real and true knowledge is possible for man, since God who knows all the data exhaustively in all their infinite relationships and who possesses therefore true knowledge is in the position to impart any portion of that knowledge to man. The Christian believes that this is precisely what God did when he revealed himself to man propositionally. And he rests in the confidence that it is precisely in and by the Scriptures—coming to him *ab extra* (from “outside the cosmos”)—that he has the “Archimedean $\rho\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\ \sigma\tau\tilde{\omega}$ ” that he needs for the buildup of knowledge and the justification of his knowledge claims. Taking all his directions from the transcendent $\rho\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\ \sigma\tau\tilde{\omega}$ of the divine mind revealed in Holy Scripture, the Christian affirms, first, the created actuality of a *real* world of knowing persons and knowable objects external to those knowing persons. Second, he affirms the legitimate necessity of both sensory experience and the reasoning process in the activity of learning, for the legitimacy of these things are authenticated by the Scriptures themselves. Finally, he happily acknowledges that the divine mind which has revealed something of its knowledge in Scripture is his $\rho\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\ \sigma\tau\tilde{\omega}$ for universals in order to justify his truth claims. ...²²

This position that Scripture is to be the foundation (not the textbook) of our knowledge can be called Scripturalism.²³

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 150

²¹ Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 115-116. Also Reymond, *Faith's Reasons*, 354-355

²² By stating “propositional”, it is clear that what Reymond had in mind is not that only propositions make up revelations, but that all revelation even those that are non-propositional in nature can be re-worked and expressed in propositions. Also, the distinction between archetypal and ectypal knowledge in Reformed orthodoxy plays no part in this aspect of revelation, for assuredly what God has revealed to us His creatures is ectypal knowledge. To claim that we can know univocally what God has revealed ectypally is nothing else than faith in God. Our knowledge is analogical to God's archetypal knowledge, but univocal with the ectypal knowledge that God revealed to us. Franciscus Junius (1545-1602) expressed this idea of God's revelation to us in his discussion of *theologia simpliciter dicta* and *theologia secundum quid*, as mentioned in Willem J. van Asselt, “The Fundamental Meaning of Theology: Archetypal and Ectypal Theology in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Thought,” *WTJ* 64 (2002): 329.

²³ Crampton, 15. “Scripture is foundational ... the name that best fits [this] system is Scripturalism”

With Scripture as the foundation for belief and knowledge, how does one address questions with regards to what authority Scripture is based upon? It is here that we turn to the doctrine of the *autopistia* of Scripture.

THE DOCTRINE OF AUTOPISTIA

The doctrine of *autopistia* simply means that “Scripture has authority in and of itself as the inspired Word of God.”²⁴ Historically, the Reformer John Calvin established the name of the doctrine in his *Institutes* as follows:²⁵

Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture; that Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit. Enlightened by him, we no longer believe, either on our own judgment or that of others, that the Scriptures are from God; but, in a way superior to human judgment, feel perfectly assured—as much so as if we beheld the divine image visibly impressed on it—that it came to us, by the instrumentality of men, from the very mouth of God.

For Calvin therefore, Scripture “carries its own evidence along with it”, thus it is shown that the external ground for Scripture’s authority is Scripture itself. As explained also in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “the claim for inspiration [which includes authority] in the Bible is one made in fullest measure by the Bible itself.”²⁶ The *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* likewise states that one primary attribute of the Bible

While Crampton claims on page 15 that “Scripturalism teaches that all our knowledge is to be derived from the Bible, which has a systematic monopoly on truth”, it is evident that the definition of “knowledge” being worked with here is something that is known to be certainly and infallibly true. This is however is a reductionist understanding of the word “knowledge”. Against this understanding of “knowledge”, see Esther Meek, *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2003), 33-34. Apart from this one caveat regarding the definition of “knowledge”, it is true that “all our [knowledge that is to be infallibly certain] is to be derived from the Bible, which has a systematic monopoly on [certain and infallible truth]”.

²⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Introductory volume to Systematic Theology*, 163. In *Systematic Theology*, New Combined Edition. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1996)

²⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. I.7.5. Translation used is the translation done by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), 72

²⁶ James Orr, “Bible”. In G.W. Bromiley, G.W., Ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), Vol. 1, 491

is its authority, whereby inspiration works out in “the authority of the Bible to bind men to believe and do whatever it teaches or commands.”²⁷

This doctrine of the *autopistia* is also part of Lutheran orthodoxy.²⁸ In the Reformed tradition, it has also been almost uniformly embraced,²⁹ achieving confessional status in the Westminster Confession of Faith, which states:

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.³⁰

Externally, the Word of God attests to itself. While certainly the testimony of the Spirit is necessary, a truth taught by both Calvin and in the Westminster Confession, the external principle of the *autopistos* of Scripture is absolutely and objectively dependent on God (2 Peter 1:20-21) even if others disbelieve it and disbelieve the authority of Scripture.

Henk van den Belt argued, however, that the term *autopistos* should be better translated as “self-convincing” rather than “self-evident.”³¹ In so doing, he maintains that “any proper translation [of *autopistos*] should maintain the element of trust from the Greek noun *pistis*.”³² In response, it must be remembered that faith itself is not only trust but also knowledge and assent.

²⁷ J. McClintock and J. Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1968), Vol. 1, 803

²⁸ Gottfried Wachler, “The Authority of Holy Scripture,” trans. by H.J.A. Bouman, *Concordia Journal* (September 1984): 172

²⁹ See for example B.B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, Vol. 2 (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 566-567; Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978), 147; Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 79-90; Berkhof, *Introduction*, 163; John Murray, “The Inspiration of the Scripture” *WTJ* 2/2 (1940): 86

³⁰ Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter I, Section 5.

³¹ Belt, 38 footnote 29

³² *Ibid.*

Furthermore, the whole idea of the necessity of the testimony of the Spirit as the *principium cognoscendi internum* shows that the “trust” element is indeed important, but that element is more related to this internal principle of knowing rather than the external principle of knowing itself. Certainly, van den Belt has reminded us of the organic nature connecting the *autopistia* of Scripture with the internal testimony of the Spirit. But while they are organically linked in the lives of believers, they can be distinguished, with *autopistia* being used more to refer to the external self-authenticating nature of Scripture, focusing on faith expressed in the elements of knowledge and assent.

Biblically speaking, what is the proof for the doctrine of *autopistia*? Van den Belt succinctly identifies the biblical basis of the *autopistia* in his sentence: “The *autopistia* of Scripture flows from its permanent *theopneustia*.”³³ Therefore, it is because Scripture is *theopneustia* or inspired that gives the Scriptures its property of self-authentication.

The adjective *theopneustos* (θεόπνευστος) in the Scriptures is a hapax legomena –occurring only once in Scripture in 2 Tim. 3:16 and being translated variously as “given by inspiration of God” (KJV, NKJV), “inspired by God” (NASB), “God-breathed” (NIV³⁴) and “breathed out by God” (ESV). In TDNT³⁵, it is stated that the word θεόπνευστος “refers very generally to all wisdom as coming from God.”³⁶ However, we can discern more from the background information given to us in that entry “πνευμα” where the word θεόπνευστος is located. Under the section “πνευμα and Inspiration,” we are told that

The “breath” of wind or of breathing is a form and mode of presentation in which esp. higher divine powers of the most varied kinds, which man cannot control, impart

³³ Belt, 42

³⁴ The wording of this verse in all three NIV versions (NIV1984, TNIV, NIV2011) is the same

³⁵ Eduard Schweizer, “πνευμα”. In Kittel, G. and Friedrich G, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968

³⁶ TDNT, Vol. VI, 453

something of the vital essence and power which they are to man or nature, whether it be for good or evil.³⁷

The Greek term πνευμα, as mentioned in TDNT, has its Hebrew counterpart in the Hebrew noun רוּחַ, which is explained to be the effective divine power, and specifically God's creative power.³⁸

From this, we can discern that the Greek adjective θεόπνευστος refers to the activity of God breathing out of which His breath contains His creative power. As applied to Scripture (γραφή), the term signifies that the Scriptures are breathed out by God and thus by virtue of their divine origin are authoritative.³⁹ Scripture partakes of God's creative power, and therefore its authority derives from the Most High.

THE DOCTRINE OF AUTOPISTIA: THE CHARGE OF CIRCULARITY

We have looked at the presuppositional system whereby Scripture is made the foundation for the justification of knowledge, being the *principium cognoscendi externum*. Externally, Scripture authenticates itself as the final authority, and this authority comes from the Almighty God who breathes out the Scriptures.

Such an apologetic will bring forth accusations of circularity. Reformed orthodoxy in an effort to avoid rationalism rightly base the *principium cognoscendi* upon the *principium essendi*,⁴⁰ which is to say that we must presuppose God in order to know anything at all. Reason is always ministerial and never magisterial.⁴¹ Therefore, ontology is stated as preceding epistemology, and true biblical knowledge is shown to be covenantal in nature. Michael S. Horton in his book *Covenant and Eschatology* elaborates further on the idea of covenant

³⁷ TDNT, Vol. VI, 343

³⁸ TDNT, Vol. VI, 362-3

³⁹ See Murray, 88-90 and Warfield, 537-79

⁴⁰ For example, see Oliphant, 26.

⁴¹ Muller, 141. "...reason has an instrumental function within the bounds of faith and not a magisterial function."

epistemology, whereby the “univocal core of both God’s being and revelation” is the person of Jesus Christ.⁴² In utilizing the idea of speech-act theory, the focus in covenant epistemology shifts to the words and the speech of God in divine discourse. For men therefore who are the recipient of God’s speech, “what dominates is the ear, not the eye; God’s addressing us, not our vision of God.”⁴³

There is indeed much truth in the divine discourse model. Yet, much as it has great descriptive and explanatory power, it is insufficient to answer the charge of circularity, except that the circle is drawn even bigger. For when Horton elucidates his divine discourse model, clearly the data for this biblical model is drawn from Scripture, and therefore we are back to the topic of the authority of Scripture, the *principium cognoscendi externum*. So epistemologically, the *principium cognoscendi* is rightly based upon the *principium essendi*, yet since the data to know what this *principium essendi* is must be drawn from Scripture, this brings us back a full circle. In this light, are we to just give up the search for certainty and adopt some kind of irrational epistemic leap of faith as our first principle, and merely claim that unless the Spirit regenerates a person⁴⁴, the knowledge of faith would be incommensurable to the knowledge of the unbeliever? If such is the case, how can any sort of apologetics be done?

In my opinion, it is better to admit the circularity up front instead of trying to explain it away. This is done for two reasons: Firstly, all epistemic systems are in the final analysis circular. Secondly, this is the epistemic method which God uses to reveal Himself to us.

The first proposition is simple enough when one thinks through the issue of knowing. As Michael J. Kruger writes, “Although most circular reasoning is negative, when one argues for an

⁴² Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 123

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 134

⁴⁴ This seems to be implied in Meek’s analogy of knowing her auto mechanic, as mentioned throughout her book.

ultimate intellectual criterion, a certain amount of circularity is unavoidable.”⁴⁵ In order to avoid an infinite regress argument which will lead a person to total skepticism and insanity, a final stopping point must be postulated for all epistemologies. As theologian John M. Frame states,

Every philosophy must use its own standards in proving its conclusions; otherwise it is simply inconsistent. Those who believe that human reason is the ultimate authority (rationalists) must presuppose the authority of reason in their arguments for rationalism. Those who believe in the ultimacy of sense experience must presuppose that in arguing for their philosophy (empiricism). And skeptics must be skeptical of their own skepticism (a fact which is, of course, the Achilles heel of skepticism). The point is that when one is arguing for an ultimate criterion . . . one must use criteria compatible with that conclusion. If that is circularity then everybody is guilty of circularity.⁴⁶

There is therefore no shame and no need to hide the fact that the Christian epistemology is circular, for all epistemologies are likewise circular. Unfortunately, many people refuse to admit that this is the case, chief among them in our modern times being the New Atheists, seen especially in the case of Richard Dawkins who is absolutely blind of his implicit empiricism.⁴⁷

Having acknowledged this truth, we can start to apply it in various ways in apologetics.⁴⁸ For the purpose of this paper however, I would be focusing on one manner of application, through utilizing the doctrine of the *autopistia* of Scripture which we have discussed.

THE DOCTRINE OF AUTOPISTIA: IN APOLOGETICS

The doctrine of the *autopistia* of Scripture, as it was mentioned earlier, is the doctrine that the authoritative Scripture authenticates itself as being authoritative. It seems to be the most circular argument ever—that Scripture is authoritative because it pronounces itself as authoritative.

⁴⁵ Michael J. Kruger, “The Sufficiency of Scripture in Apologetics,” *TMSJ* 12/1 (Spring 2001): 81. See also Cornelius Van Til & K Scott Oliphant, Ed., *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th Ed. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2008), 123

⁴⁶ John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), 10

⁴⁷ See footnote 5 above

⁴⁸ See Kruger, 84 where one method of applying this truth is explained.

Nevertheless, this indeed is the epistemic method that God uses in His revelation to us, proving once again that the foolishness of God is wiser than Man's wisdom (1 Cor. 1:25a).

Scripture is the epistemic ground of our knowledge. God as the *principium essendi* is the basis of everything including our knowledge. If we are to ask for justification at this level, how does God prove Himself to be God? What is the method that God uses to validate Himself in condescension to us His weak creatures? Looking at the Scriptures, we can see that the strongest method God uses to validate Himself is to swear by His own name.⁴⁹ While the covenant motif is certainly important in the event of Moses' call at the burning bush (Exod. 3:6), God used His own name (Exod. 3:14) as the strongest guarantee that He is who He says He is.

This should strike us as another circular argument, because it is in fact one. The reason why we have special certainty in God's faithfulness and trustworthiness is because God made it a point to claim He is faithful and trustworthy based upon His name. While certainly this is good enough for us covenantally since God's name has infinite worth and value to us, epistemologically the argument is circular, distilling down to the formula "God is who He is (God who can be trusted), based upon who He says He is (through swearing by His name)." Such circularity seems to be logically fallacious and as such seen to have no apologetic value at all and to be a liability; a scandal of the truth.

We can therefore draw a direct analogy between the *autopistia* of Scripture and the swearing of God by His own name. The former has to do with the *principium cognoscendi externum* and the latter the *principium essendi*. Just as in the latter God swore by His own name because there is nothing higher for Him to swear by (Heb. 6:13, 16-17), in the former Scripture attests to itself because there is no sacred document or manner of knowing higher than God's superintended revelation in the Scriptures.

⁴⁹ Some verses where God swore by Himself are Gen. 22:16, Is. 45:23, Jer. 22:5; 49:13; 51:14, Amos 6:8

The nature of an ultimate authority as we have seen of necessity must be circular. It cannot appeal to anything else for otherwise it is not the ultimate authority and whatever it appeals to is a higher authority than it. Therefore, when God swears by Himself, it is not only valid but is the only thing that God can swear by. Similarly, Scripture as the highest authority can only appeal to itself as such, for it can appeal to no other authority besides itself as the objective revelation breathed out by God.

What is the import of this doctrine in apologetics? Since all epistemologies are circular, the fact that the ultimate authority of the faith appeals to itself is actually self-consistent with its own claim to be the ultimate authority. Although it is most definitely not sufficient to prove the faith, as if apart from the work of the Spirit anyone can be argued into the kingdom, the coherency of the Christian system is a work of beauty indeed.

An apologetic application of this is the undermining of rival epistemologies at their root. For if ultimate authorities are to be true, not only must they function as the foundation for all knowledge, but they must claim to be ultimate authorities too. After all, to be an ultimate authority means that they should touch on the nature of ultimate authority itself, otherwise the question of ultimate authority is either dependent on another authority (which means they are not ultimate), or left hanging in mid air– assumed but not answered.

Along these lines, we have a platform to critique rival epistemologies. Empiricism can be critiqued because there is nothing in empiricism to validate empiricism as a valid epistemology. Rationalism can be similarly critiqued since formulae such as *Cogito Ergo Sum* (I think therefore I am) are not inherently found in reason but reasoned out in order to support rationalism. In other word, reason itself never claimed to be an ultimate authority in any sense. Rather, it is fallen men

who cling on to reason as their ultimate authority since that is internally all they have, and they therefore make reason their ultimate authority by an irrational leap of faith.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have seen the superiority of revelation and presuppositional epistemology over both Empiricism and Rationalism in dealing with the foundation of knowledge. Only revelation as the *principium cognoscendi* and Scripture as the *principium cognoscendi externum* can function as the ground and foundation for all our knowledge. The doctrine of the *autopistia* of Scripture not only is not a weakness in the Christian system, but rather since all epistemologies are circular, it is the supreme strength of presuppositional epistemology which we can use as an apologetic against rival epistemic systems.

While showing forth how the doctrine of *autopistia* can be used as an apologetic for Christianity, we may use other presuppositional methods as well. Certainly, we can press the antithesis and show the non-Christians that “they need to presuppose the truth of Christian theism in order to account for their own accomplishments.”⁵⁰ We can also show that all non-Christian epistemologies are fallacious and thus cannot convey truth in and of themselves.⁵¹ All such methods are perfectly valid for demolishing the pretensions of Man in their autonomous rejection of God, and leave him without excuse before the God he rebels against.

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God,
and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor. 10:5)

⁵⁰ Van Til and Oliphant, ed., 126

⁵¹ Crampton, 16-25

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