

# Apologetics — Epistemology

## Apologetics — Epistemology (Certainty)

“Now, I maintain that all attempts to make a merely speculative use of reason in regard to theology are entirely fruitless and are—by their intrinsic character—null and void, but that the principles of reason’s natural use lead to no theology whatsoever . . .”

—— Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), 613.

## Apologetics — Epistemology (Circularity)

“To deny circularity when it comes to an ultimate authority is to subject oneself to an infinite regress of reasons. If a person holds to a certain view, A, then when A is challenged he appeals to reasons B and C. But, of course, B and C will certainly be challenged as to why they should be accepted, and then the person would have to offer D, E, F, and G as arguments for B and C. And the process goes on and on. Obviously it has to stop somewhere because an infinite regress of arguments cannot demonstrate the truth of one’s conclusions. Thus, every worldview (and every argument) must have an ultimate, unquestioned, self-authenticating starting point. Another example: imagine someone asking you whether the meter stick in your house was actually a meter long. How would you demonstrate such a thing? You could take it to your next-door neighbor and compare it to his meter stick and say, “See, it’s a meter.” However, the next question is obvious, “How do we know your neighbor’s meter stick is really a meter?” This process would go on and on infinitely unless there were an ultimate meter stick (which, if I am not mistaken, actually existed at one time and was measured by two fine lines marked on a bar of platinum-iridium alloy). It is this ultimate meter stick that defines a meter. When asked how one knows whether the ultimate meter stick is a meter, the answer is obviously circular: the ultimate meter stick is a meter because it is a meter. This same thing is true for Scripture. The Bible does not just happen to be true (the meter stick in your house), rather it is the very criterion for truth (the ultimate meter stick) and therefore the final stopping point in intellectual justification.”

—— Michael Kruger, *The Sufficiency of Scripture in Apologetics*, 200-201.

“The charge is made that we engage in circular reasoning. Now if it be called circular reasoning when we hold it necessary to presuppose the existence of God, we are not ashamed of it because we are firmly convinced that all forms of reasoning that leave God out of account will end in ruin. Yet we hold that our reasoning cannot fairly be called circular reasoning, because we are not reasoning about and seeking to explain facts by assuming the existence and meaning of certain other facts on the same level of being with the facts we are investigating, and then explaining these facts in turn by the facts with which we began. We are presupposing God, not merely another fact of the universe. If God is to come into contact with us at all it is natural that the initiative must be with him. And this will also apply to the very question about the relation of God to us. Accordingly, it is only on God’s own testimony that we can know anything about him.”

—— Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 201.

“The sinner wants to test that which presents itself as the revelation of God by a standard not itself taken from this revelation. He complains of the circular reasoning that would be involved in accepting the word of Scripture about the nature of Scripture. So then, to overcome this hostile attitude of the sinner it is necessary that the Holy Spirit convict him of his sin in not accepting the Bible as the Word of God. The miracles, the prophecies fulfilled, the symmetry of its parts, etc., will all be misinterpreted because interpreted by the wrong standard, unless the Spirit convicts and convinces the sinner that he is dealing with the Word of God.”

—— Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 33–34.

“The way I explain Van Til’s use of circular reasoning can be found in *Defense of the Faith*, 4th edition, p. 123, n.8: Van Til is not advocating fallacious reasoning here. Though much more needs to be said, a couple of points should be remembered when Van Til wants to affirm circular reasoning: (1) Circular reasoning is not the same as a circular argument. A circular argument is one in which the conclusion of the argument is also assumed in one or more of the premises. Van Til’s notion of circularity is broader, and more inclusive, than a strict argument form. For example, in William Alston, *The Reliability of Sense Perception* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), Alston argues that it is impossible to establish that one has knowledge in a certain area without at the same time presupposing some knowledge in that area. His example is an argument for the reliability of sense perception. Any argument for such reliability presupposes that reliability. And it does so because of the epistemic situation in which human beings exist. Alston is right here, it seems. Not only so, but, to go deeper, the epistemic and metaphysical situation in which human beings exist is one in which the source of and rationale for all that we are and think is, ultimately, in the Triune God of Scripture. Circularity in this sense is inevitable. We will never be outside the context of image of God as we think and live—not in this life or

the next. (2) Van Til's affirmation of circular reasoning should be seen in the context of the point he makes in various places about "indirect" arguments. Any *petitio principii*, by definition, a direct argument—containing premises and a conclusion. Van Til's indirect method moves one out of the context of a strict proof or direct argument, and into the context of the rationale for any fact or law assumed to be, or to be true. Thus, circularity is inextricably linked to the transcendental approach, and is not meant to be in reference, strictly speaking, to direct argumentation."

Website Reference: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/answeringobjections-to-presuppositionalism/>

#### Apologetics — Epistemology (Revelatory)

"In a sense, all knowledge may be viewed as revelational, since meaning is not imposed upon things by the human knower alone, but rather is made possible because mankind and the universe are the work of a rational Deity, who fashioned an intelligible creation. Human knowledge is not a source of knowledge to be contrasted with revelation, but is a means of comprehending revelation. . . . Thus God, by his immanence, sustains the human knower, even in his moral and cognitive revolt, and without that divine preservation, ironically enough, man could not even rebel against God, for he would not exist. Augustine, early in the Christian centuries, detected what was implied in this conviction that human reason is not the creator of its own object; neither the external world of sensation nor the internal world of ideas is rooted subjectivistic factors alone."

— Carl Henry, *The Drift of Western Thought*, 104.

"Simply to claim that one is starting with the Bible is not to say much. In the first place, most heretics have claimed as much. Second, we have to recognize the plurality of textual kinds in the Bible. There are two testaments, four Gospels and a dozen or so major types of literary genres. Can one approach to reading the Bible do justice to its literary, historical and theological variety? While we may wish to begin with the Bible as the 'most perfect Word,' this starting point alone does not tell us which of the many interpretative approaches to employ. What does it mean to do theology 'according to the Scriptures'? . . . Doing theology according to the Scripture, then, is harder than it first looks."

— Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 28. See the related expression of David H. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 1.

"The only two possible sources for epistemology are God and creation. In the category of creation, candidates include human reason, human experience, and human existence. Instead of rationalism, empiricism, or existentialism, the only divinely-authorized for hermeneutics is God's Word."

— Johnathan D. Anderson, *The Presuppositional Hermeneutic: An Argument for Interpreting and Preaching the Bible with Authority* (A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), 15.

[A] Revelatory Epistemology ~ Is a theory of knowledge which argues that all knowledge stems from the one true creator God via nature, innately, or through the Word of God. Without this epistemological grounding we cannot make sense of the world around us.

[B] Autonomous Epistemology ~ Is a theory of knowledge [rationalism, empiricism] which relies on external factors [sensory or rational inquiry] to determine a grounding for knowledge without first starting with God.