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## SPOIL THE PAGANS!: CIRCULAR THINKING AND DOMINION (Knowledge and Politics, Part III)

By Archie P. Jones

All human thought is necessarily—because of man's finitude and his ethical rebellion against his Creator—religious. Man cannot escape the presuppositional nature of his own thinking. Presuppositions are in their very nature religious, since they are based on faith and deal with theological questions, such as the existence and attributes of God, the nature of reality, and the nature and destiny of man. It is impossible for man to escape the religious nature of his thought. And because all human thought is presuppositional, it is impossible for man to avoid the so-called fallacy of circular argument, for all thought is circular and ultimately, religious. The question is: **Which religion is true?** Can any of these circles of human thought lead beyond themselves? If so, which one is the true religion which escapes meaninglessness and makes knowledge possible to man?

### Arguing in Circles

The popular argument against Christian reasoning from the Bible is a sham and a delusion. It is a pseudo-philosophical cover for rebellion against God's word and law. Humanists use the word "religion" to indicate intellectual weakness or superstition on the part of those who hold to the revealed word of God and place their faith in the God of Scripture, the risen Christ. Christ, however, is the One in whom all things consist (Col. 1:1-7); In Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). He is the Creator (Acts 17:24), who puts all things together. The Christian can trust the word of such a sovereign God; he can surely know reality upon the firm foundation of a God who literally holds man and the universe together every instant.

It is the Humanist who is "religious", in the pejorative sense intended by humanistic apologists and propagandists. For the Humanist believes in, at best, a limited, finite god who is no sovereign creator and sustainer of the universe, a god who therefore cannot speak sovereignly to man. But the false, limited god of the Humanists cannot possibly be a basis for knowledge of anything. A god who exists in a larger "universe," exists as a prisoner of that "universe," for he is limited by the content of his environment, an environment which as Van Til has noted, he, too, must explore. This is especially true because Humanists presuppose that the "universe" is a **chance**, "evolving" thing. Chance is inherently irrational. If chance exists in the "universe" we have an irrational universe. In an irrational universe man can know nothing for sure.

It takes greater faith to believe in Humanism's irrational "universe" than it does in the universe described in the Bible. Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the proof of things unseen (Heb. 11:1). The Humanist has faith that his autonomous mind or reason can at least provide him with adequate knowledge to enable him to lead his life free from the requirements of God. But

the substance of things which the Humanist hopes for will indeed prove to be unseen, for in terms of his own presupposition of human autonomy and its correlative presupposition of an irrational "universe," it is seen to be proven that man can know nothing.

There is an important distinction between **kinds of circles**, between kinds of circular arguments. All men argue in circles, but **humanistic circles are fundamentally different from Christian circles**. Consider some of the differences between humanistic circles (or circular arguments) and Christian circles.

Humanistic arguments are necessarily both circular and religious in nature. But humanistic circular arguments are crucially different from Christian circles. First, humanistic circles are direct products of man's **ethical rebellion** against God; Christian circles are not. Humanist circles are products of the will of man to be as God, to determine good and evil for himself (Gen. 3:5).

Second, humanistic circles are epistemological treadmills, from which there is no escape. No matter how seemingly ingenious their construction, no matter how elaborate their decoration, humanistic claims to knowledge are but a facade. It is impossible for humanistic man, **in his own terms**, to know anything. To enter the humanistic circles of knowledge—theories on terms of humanistic faith—is to commit **intellectual suicide**.

Third, because humanism's theories of knowledge inevitably lead to doubt about the ability of man to know they inevitably lead to the conclusion that one cannot know any moral standards. And if one cannot know any objective moral standards, then not only intellectual, but also **cultural, suicide** is the inevitable consequence. Humanism's circular arguments lead directly to the inability of the individual and the culture to function realistically in the world as it truly is: God's world.

Fourth, Humanism's circles are therefore the **broad way** (with many individual and cultural paths on it) **which leadeth to destruction**. This destruction is really suicidal, for man's claim to be autonomous represents his rebellion against a) the evidence of God's existence and attributes present in His creation (Rom. 1:18-21), b) the law of God written on man's heart (Gen. 1:26, 27; Rom. 1:18-21; Rom. 2:14, 15), and c) the fact that God **sovereignly** requires man to obey His law (Gen. 3:5; Deut. 28; Matt. 5:17-19; Rom. 14:15; 15:14), and punishes those who violate His ordinances. Unless thwarted by God's grace, individual and cultural rebellion bring God's judgment. Humanism's circles are really avenues to the Pit, highways to everlasting death.

### The Christian Circle

The Christian argument is fundamentally different. First, presuppositions are Biblical presuppositions, God's presuppositions. The Christian argument presupposes the Sovereign, Triune

Creator, Lawgiver, Saviour, Self-revealing Judge, who alone is the Foundation of knowledge.

Second, the Christian argument is therefore **God's circle**, not man's.

Third, the Christian circle is the **only true—and possible—foundation of knowledge**; it contains no irrationality which leads to intellectual suicide. It is the only circle which, in its own terms, can provide for a constructive use of man's reason. The Christian circle reasons always in terms of the infallibly inspired word of God in Scripture, as illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Because God is **Sovereign, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe**, who holds all things together, man can know that he is living, by the grace of God, in a rational universe. Man cannot fully understand the universe, because God's ways are higher than man's ways, but man can have true knowledge of the universe and of the things in it, for God has spoken propositionally to man in Scripture. The Triune Creator and Sustainer of the universe fully knows the universe; there is nothing in it outside his control or knowledge. Because the Lord is perfectly good, just and true, he speaks truly to man in Scripture. The man who believes on Christ as Lord and Saviour can therefore have certain knowledge of God, man and things.

Moreover, because God both created and sustains the universe, the Christian can have **true empirical and true rational knowledge** of the universe. Since God is rational and has revealed Himself to us, we can study the individual phenomena of creation, learning the relationships that exist between them because we know that they exist within a framework of God's ordinances, under the authority of His word and law.

By the same token, the Christian can have true rational knowledge of the universe and its contents because only upon the foundation of the existence, attributes, word and law of the Triune God can man truly know the universal principles of men and things. The only possible universals in terms of which man can know and act are the universals established and revealed by the Creator. All others can be no more than fallible approximations—which are at the same time deliberate perversions—of God's ordinances and laws. The Christian can rationally know the relationships between individual men and things because he knows the universals ordained by the Creator and Sustainer of men and things. It is only upon Biblical premises that a man can know that he indeed lives in a universe, not a chaos of blind evolutionary chance. Biblical principles are the one way out of the morass of skepticism, meaninglessness and individual and cultural suicide.

Fourth, therefore the biblical circle, ordained by the grace of God, is the only epistemological circle which **leads upward, not downward**, in a straight line. The biblical line leads **straight to knowledge**: knowledge of God, of man, of self, of things, and of the interrelationships of all things. Because God's word is the only true word, it is the one basis of comprehensive, coherent and relevant knowledge. Though God does not reveal to man all that God knows, man can be sure that what God has revealed is comprehensively true; there is nothing outside of God which will or can make God's word untrue. Because God is **Sovereign**, His word is **comprehensively true**. Because He has no internal inconsistency or disagreement between His Three Persons, His word is **coherent**: in Him all things consist, and His word and law speak authoritatively to all things. For these reasons His word is **relevant** to all matters and is thus relevant for man.

The would-be-autonomous man's quest for comprehensive, coherent and relevant knowledge is an impossible dream, in terms of his own presuppositions. It is only the man who begins from biblical faith who, accepting Christ and His word, can truly have such knowledge. The circles of "autonomous" man lead to individual and cultural judgment and death. The Christian circle leads directly to individual and cultural life. The way of the Christian is not

a flat, smooth and easy line—so far as our battle (already won by the work of Christ on the cross and being progressively brought to fruition by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit) with the world, the flesh and the Devil is concerned—but it is a **straight line**: it leads straight to individual and cultural knowledge, blessings (cf. Deut. 6, 28, etc.) and life; for the Christian, it leads ultimately not to would-be autonomous death, but to everlasting life.

### The Way to Dominion

Fifth, the Christian circle leads not to individual and cultural impotence and destruction, but to **godly dominion** (Gen. 1:26-28), to the fulfillment of our Lord's command to **occupy** till He comes (Luke 19:13). God's original command to man to have dominion, under Him, "over every living thing" accompanied by His blessing, has never been repealed. Moreover, our Lord reinforced His creation ordinance by His command to occupy for Him, in terms of His law, until He returns. Note that our Lord's command, while it points to our heavenly destiny, speaks also directly to how His servants are to live on earth. It is stated in economic terms, but also in a word which has culture-wide implications, embracing economic, intellectual, military and other activities.

Note well that His parable of the servants, the vehicle of His commandment, contains **no hint of eschatological pessimism**, no promise of defeat in the duty of occupying. It is the wicked servant who does not occupy; the good servants occupy according to their use of the resources which the Lord has given them; they multiply His income, His capital, by working and investing it in terms of His authority, word and law (Luke 19:28-38). The wicked servant disobeys his Lord's command to occupy, substituting his own standard for the Lord's word and law. He does not occupy, and is consequently punished (Luke 19:15-26). The good servants, who follow the Lord's command, do occupy; and for their faithfulness they are greatly rewarded (Luke 19:16-25).

It is also important to notice that the good servants occupy in spite of the presence of the Lord's enemies. God's enemies are not told by the Lord to occupy. They seek, however, to occupy in terms of their own perverted standard, their own word as law. But **God's enemies do not occupy, even in terms of their own standards. God's servants—even the wicked ones—are not "raptured out" of the world, nor are they defeated** by the enemies of the Lord. Rather, when the Lord returns He finds that those who are faithful servants have occupied for Him, working for the Lord, utilizing what He has given them, in terms of His law. Faithful servants do not retreat from the enemy, into their various cloisters; rather they go out and work for the Lord, in terms of His standards, not in terms of their own standards. Covenantal obedience to His standards brings not defeat, but victory.

### Spoil the Pagans! A Strategy for Occupation

Humanistic presuppositions preclude man from knowing himself or anything, when consistently adhered to. Thus, the inevitable result of Humanism is that, sooner or later, God allows it to work itself out to its own logical conclusions, the consequence of which is lawlessness and death, to the individual and to the culture. Humanism is but a form of antinomianism, and antinomian teachings lead to antinomian individual and political actions, which lead in turn to individual or collective destruction.

The Christian duty to occupy for our Lord should be motivated not only by awareness of the epistemological impotence, of all humanistic philosophies, but must also be founded on the knowledge that God is a **providential God**, working to establish what He has ordained for individuals and nations, bringing them to **judgment**. Faithful servants of the Lord act in terms of the knowledge abundantly chronicled in Scripture and in subsequent history, that Christ has brought His enemies to judgment and destruction, and that when comes the end of history,

"he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." (I Cor. 15:24-25).

The duty of Christian occupation is founded, maintained and assured of productivity and rewards not because of the work of man, but because of **the work of the Holy Spirit**. The saving, sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit is the warp and woof of Christian history. It must also be the warp and woof of Christian culture and society. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts men of sin, by manifesting to them their violations of God's law, Who works within their hearts to prepare them to choose Christ as their personal Savior, and Who abides with them, working within their hearts to cause them to will to do that which is pleasing in God's sight. It is precisely because God is Lord (Phil. 2:5-11) that the word of God exhorts us to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Phil. 2:12, 13).

If the Holy Spirit is the Inner Dynamic of our duty to occupy for Christ, **God's law-word is our external standard** for thought and action. It is not a totally external standard, for God has written His law on our hearts. We all naturally know God's law. But the heart of fallen man is naturally, since the Fall, in rebellion against the Creator and His law (Rom. 2:14, 15), and this rebellion will not be fully squelched this side of Heaven. So **we are not to look inward**, after the manner of Quakers, Romantics and Neo-Kantians, for an objective standard of conduct, but rather to obey the law of God (Matt. 5:17-20; John 14:15; 15:14; 17:17; Deut. 5-7; 28).

God's law is not only a schoolmaster to drive us to Christ, but also a perfect guide to theoretical and practical life. God's word is law, and all of His inspired word is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:16). His word is the only foundation of knowledge (Prov. 3:5). Godly occupation can only be founded on the **knowledge and practice of His law-word** (Deut. 28, etc.; Luke 19:12-27; etc.) Thus under Christ's sovereign power, we are to go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Trinity and **teaching them to observe all things whatsoever He has commanded us** (Matt. 28:19, 20). It is because God's law is authoritative, and because it brings blessings (cf. Deuteronomy, Proverbs, etc.) that we are to fear the Lord, to keep all his statutes and commandments, to ensure that our children keep them, and to teach His commandments diligently to our children (Deut. 6:1-9).

#### **Spoil the Pagans! (But Beware of Greeks Bearing Gifts!)**

Pagans seek comprehensive, coherent and relevant knowledge. But they are impossible for a finite, would-be-autonomous man. Leave Christ out of your theoretical framework and you cannot know how things cohere, or what is coherent.

Without any standard of comprehensive or coherent knowledge, it is impossible for man to know what is truly relevant to his concerns. Desiring to be his own standard, the measure of all things, man rebels against the created order of things, and so must posit at the outset a distorted universe with perverted relationships between men and things. It is for this reason, as Romans 1:18-32 makes clear, that the Lord abandons man to allow him to follow his rebellious premises into gross sins and eventual death. Autonomy which is living godhood—creature worship—is the goal of the pagan, the Humanist. Autonomy is an impossible dream, epistemologically or culturally: its end is failure and death.

There is a sense, however, in which the pagans can have knowledge. Like it or not, all men live in God's world. The evidence of His existence and attributes is manifest in His created and provi-

dentially sustained order of the universe (Rom. 1:20). Knowledge of His law is written upon men's hearts. Living in God's world and having a knowledge of God's law on his heart, man can utilize his reason productively for practical living and reflective thought.

The difficulty is that apart from the saving, sanctifying grace of God, man wants to use his mind autonomously: he suppresses his knowledge of the truth (Rom. 1:18), and attempts to be as a god, defining good and evil in terms of his own evaluation of things (Gen. 3-5). The instant that man does this, he has destroyed his own claim to knowledge, and with it his attempt to be as God. The denial of God immediately throws man into an irrational "universe," in which, by definition, man cannot know anything. If **rebellious, would-be-autonomous man were true to his own presuppositions, he could not think or even live. Truly, sinful men must presuppose God even while they deny Him.** The pagans can know some things truly, but only because they live in God's world: only because they are inconsistent with their own pagan premises.

Pagan thought has a dual, **schizophrenic**, character. Insofar as it is consistent with its own unbiblical premises, pagan thought can truly know nothing, for its premises exclude the possibility of knowledge by autonomous man. **Insofar as it is inconsistent with its anti-biblical premises—insofar as it smuggles in a presupposition of God and His law, and no further—pagan thought is capable of limited knowledge.** Because it is inconsistent with its own premises, pagan thought is capable of discovering some of the true relationships ordained between men and things. **But because it steadfastly and self-consciously refuses to abandon its anti-Christian presuppositions, the fundamental relationships of things can never be what any variety of pagan philosophy says they are.**

This dual character of pagan thought makes it at the same time **useful and dangerous**, subtle and yet always erroneous, alluring and yet deadly. If we may be permitted to utilize a metaphor from some ancient pagans, **pagan knowledge is a Trojan Horse.**

#### **How to Spoil the Pagans (In 18 Easy Lessons!)**

This dual character of pagan thought mandates its careful handling by Christians. We are not to learn the way of the heathen. And yet the Lord had the children of Israel scout out the enemy's camps, terrain, people, and fortresses before attacking. And Paul surely had to know the nature of the Greeks' religious and philosophical beliefs before he could tell them that their "Unknown God" is truly not unknown, but is indeed the Triune God of Scripture (Act 17:16-32).

Medieval Christian scholars had a slogan: "Spoil the Pagans." They did not mean by this that they would let the pagans rot, for we are commanded to go into all the world and teach. They meant, of course, to treat the riches of pagan thought and culture in the same way as a conquering army treats the riches of a captured city: **capture them and put them to the Lord's use.** This desire to spoil the pagans was, in itself, good, for it was manifestation of the Christian duty to occupy for Christ which led to the Christianization of European and American society and culture.

Anyone who doubts the significance of this dominion activity should peruse R. J. Rushdoony's **World History Notes**. A striking example is the Lombards, who were cannibals before the coming of Christian influence. Now some of their descendants are musicians, which is not quite so bad. Any reader of the **Volunga-saga**, or other Germanic and Norse epics can readily attest to the benevolent influence of Christian doctrines upon the people of Europe. And any student of modern thought can as readily attest to the terrible influence of the humanistic doctrine on hundreds of millions of modern men.

The difficulty with the medieval program of occupation was its departure from the fullness of God's counsel. Medieval thinkers

started with an undue influence of syncretism of biblical and pagan thought. Many were intellectually schizophrenic in their desire to capture Aristotle for use against Arab and Jewish philosophers. When Aquinas was commissioned by the Pope to synthesize Aristotelian philosophy and God's revelation he embarked on an anti-Scriptural enterprise, with profound consequences for the deformation of the counsel of God, and subsequently for the ability of Christianity to defend itself against the

Humanism which he brought into the City of God.

The failure of others does not nullify our Lord's command to occupy for Him. We remain His servants, given talents and resources to use for Him, in accordance with His law-word. Because Christians have been wicked servants, have failed to occupy for Him, His Church today is besieged by pagans. Moreover, there are pagans within the (visible) Church as well as without.

**(Continued Next Issue)**

## **EGALITARIANISM vs. THE FAMILY** **(The Battle For The Family, Part IV)**

*By Archie P. Jones*

### **Egalitarianism Has Consequences**

If it is admitted that the teachings of Holy Scripture are true, then it should be obvious that the consequences of egalitarian teaching and practice will be harmful to godly persons and institutions. Bad roots don't produce good fruits. By their fruits shall ye know them.

Egalitarianism is a curious intellectual and moral relativism which **requires** intellectual, political, social and economic **levelling** of all people, for if equality is just, then all inequalities must be removed. Ostensible political equality is the means, but since the majority does not wish also to be levelled economically and socially, actual **manipulation** of the many **by the elite** few is the true practice. The power of government must be used to reduce all individuals to an equality of condition. This drastically limits the freedom not only of individuals but also of families to lead their lives, for families are the main means of transmitting inequality of economic, social, moral and intellectual status to future generations.

Economically, the result of egalitarianism is governmental **planning and controls** designed to achieve equality of economic and social condition. Taxation will be an integral part of the egalitarian program, as politicians rob to play Robin Hood. Taxes on those above average income must increase, to **redistribute wealth** via theft. Inheritance taxes must also be increased, for inheritance is one of the chief means of transmitting inequality. The **hostility** of egalitarians to the family has not been fully appreciated. The egalitarian says, in effect, to parents: "What right have you to transmit your unequal wealth to your children, simply because they are the people that you love most in the whole world?" Egalitarians talk of compassion, but they have none for the godly duties and desires of parents. The counterproductive effect of egalitarian taxation on the economy is apparent, and when the economy suffers the family suffers.

Now, governmental taxation is never sufficient to pay for all the programs desired and promised by egalitarian politicians. They therefore resort to **borrowing money on the capital market**, money which could have gone to research and development, to *new construction and new technology, to greater productivity*. Instead, it goes to bureaucrats and various influential recipients, mostly the former. In any case, the increased productivity is lost, and rich and poor families suffer unnecessary economic deprivations as a result.

**Inflation** of the money supply is also a time-dishonored method of financing redistributionist welfarism, especially when applied egalitarianism raises the taxation above twenty five percent of income. As we are now seeing, to our distress, inflation has a whole series of economic and social consequences, none of them good—which is not surprising, since inflation itself is nothing but the evil of theft. Inflation robs the family of purchasing power,

decimates savings, gradually destroys the middle class, and renders precarious the existence of the elderly and the poor, causing them in turn to look to egalitarian politicians for government aid in their distress. This, of course, does nothing but further increase the cost of government, leading to increased inflation.

The moral consequences of inflation, which we can but abbreviate here, are less comforting: a gambling mentality, decreased incentives to work, save and invest, increased dependence on government welfare, increased incentives to crime, increasing class hostility, and increased popular hostility to government. As inflation proceeds, the economy as well as the increasingly debased currency is threatened with destruction. Then the famous dictum of Keynes becomes starkly relevant:

There is no subtler, no surer means of overturning the existing basis of society than to debauch the currency.

The process engages all the hidden forces of economic law on the side of destruction, and it does it in a manner which not one man in a million can diagnose.

Meanwhile, on the domestic front, egalitarianism requires economic regulations, ostensibly to protect the weak from the strong. The effect, however, is contrary: the strong are protected, the weak prevented from advancing, and the nation in general is robbed by the growing inefficiency, paperwork and disincentives to productivity legislated by growing regulations and decrees. Our current regulations cost hundreds of millions of dollars annually, adversely affecting family income and freedom.

Nor are foreign snafus neglected by egalitarians; rather, they are nourished, being subsidized by theft from American taxpayers and citizens. After all, does equality stop at America's borders? What's sauce for the American goose is sauce for the foreign gander: egalitarianism at home finances egalitarianism abroad, to the tune of billions in squandered resources, millions of lives and the creation of mortal threats to our national existence.

We can but adumbrate the social and (im)moral assaults of egalitarianism on the family: the ERA, the IYC, the Draft (of women as well as men—just as anti-ERA folks have said and pro-ERA pushers have denied; though this seems unlikely to be established as national policy, it is due to political expediency, not to principle), government-pushed immorality (via the "public" schools), abortion, and government redefinition of the queer "Liberation," family. But a little reflection will reveal the egalitarian and moral relativist foundations of these Humanist assaults on the biblical family, as well as its comprehensive nature. The impact of economic egalitarianism is usually more subtle; that of social levelling just because it is founded on egalitarian reductionism and moral relativism, is easier for the discerning Christian to perceive. It requires but a little biblical reflection to see that the need for Christian action in defense of the family is both comprehensive and urgent.

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