

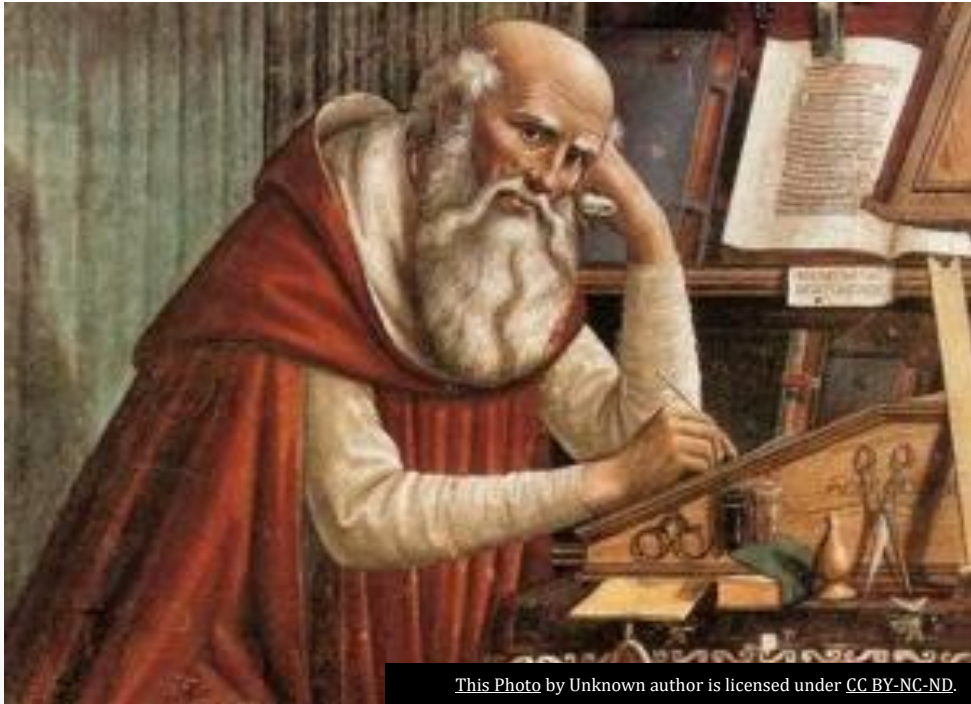
By The Light of The Mind:

Augustine and Gordon H. Clark on
Truth and the Existence of God

Introduction

- What is Truth and how do we have a concept of it?
- Augustine is interested in this question and uses it as a starting point for an argument for God.
- Truth is eternal, immutable, mental, existing outside of the mind, and superior to the mind therefore it must have an ontological basis which is in the mind of God.
- This argument is found in book two of *On Free Choice of the Will*.
- Gordon H. Clark fleshed out this argument and developed five premises for it in his book *A Christian View of Men and Things*.

The First Premise



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- The first premise of this argument is truth exists
- Augustine argues in favor of this point by arguing that numbers are an example of absolute truth.
- Clark argues for this by appealing to Plato who argued that all knowledge must have an object which is truth.
- We seem to know things which correspond to things in the natural world.

The Second Premise

- Truth is eternal.
- Augustine argues that wisdom or truth is like the sun which illuminates everything.
- People find happiness in different things, but they "see" these things by the light of truth which is eternal and unchanging.
- Clark argues that a view of truth as not eternal is self-contradictory.
- If things can be true today and false, tomorrow then it could be false at some point in the future that truth is not eternal.
- If truth stopped existing, then it would be true that truth stopped existing.

The Third Premise

- Truth is immutable.
- “who would deny that one should turn one’s soul from corruption to incorruption; or in other words, that one should not love corruption but rather incorruption? And who, admitting that this is true, would not also understand that this truth is unchangeable” - Augustine in *On Free Choice of the Will* book 2 pg. 50
- This premise is highly related to the second premise, and it is reliant on the second premise because if truth were not eternal then it would undergo change.
- Augustine believes that the virtues are immutable and discovered in the same way as numbers because they are known by all people.

Propositions

- When talking about truths being eternal and immutable Clark has in mind true propositions.
- Propositions are statements which refer to a very particular state of affairs without reference to time or a particular person.
- Propositions do not undergo change.
- Clark argues that propositions which state there is no absolute truth assume the claim truth is relative is an absolute truth.

The Fourth Premise

- Truth is mental.
- “Even if numbers were perceived by the bodily senses, it would not follow that I could also perceive the rules of addition and subtraction by the bodily senses. It is by the light of the mind that I refute someone who makes a mistake in adding or subtracting.” - Evodius in *On Free Choice of the Will* book 2 pg. 44
- Augustine seems to view things which are perceived by the mind as eternal and immutable by this he means things which we know yet cannot perceive by the bodily senses.
- Clark argues that the existence of truth presupposes the existence of minds because without minds truth could not exist.

The Fourth Premise Continued

- Clark argues that truth cannot be found in chemical processes in the brain because chemical processes cannot be true or false.
- Therefore, if the mind does not exist then truth cannot exist either.
- If truth had some kind of physical motion in the brain then no two people could have the same thought because each physical motion in the brain is a unique event in a specific moment in time.
- If one argued that these motions are similar enough for memory and communication Clark would ask how the brain would know they are similar or how they would be measured against each other without the use of a third motion.

The Fifth Premise

- Truth is superior to the human mind.
- “We make these judgments in accordance with the inner rules of truth, which we perceive in common; but no one makes judgments about those rules.” - Augustine in *On Free Choice of the Will* book 2 pg. 55
- Augustine argues that if truth were equal to the human mind, it would be changeable like the human mind.
- Clark argues that certain truths are necessary, universal, and known by all people because these truths are universal and immutable, they cannot be contained in the human mind.
- Truth cannot be equal to the sum total of human minds because everyone on earth believing something does not make it true.
- The student and teacher analogy

Conclusion

- Based on these premises Augustine comes to the conclusion that truth is God.
- In the original dialogue with Evodius this is all he has to prove.
- Clark comes to the conclusion that truth must have and ontological ground.
- Based on the premises propositions must be grounded in an eternal and immutable mind.
- Propositions must be grounded in the mind of God.

Critique

- Augustine's premise that truth is mental which Clark uses to explain memory and consciousness is open to critique because it has not been demonstrated that the human mind is purely mental
- A physical basis for consciousness is epistemically possible because the mind could work like a computer with physical motions being stored in physical memory.
- This thus provides an epistemic possibility for the mind being ontologically based on the brain.

Critique Continued

- A transcendent being which would be the basis for truth would not have a brain because this being being transcendent would not have a localized center of consciousness.
- But the evidence for the existence of such a being could be undermined by the existence of a physical basis for the human mind because it might imply that truth does not have to have an ultimate basis in a transcendent.
- Further research is needed to investigate the metaphysical possibility of my critique or to prove that my critique is irrelevant to Augustine's or Clark's argument.

Citations

- Augustine, and Thomas Williams. *On Free Choice of the Will*. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett., 1993.
- Clark, Gordon H. *A Christian View of Men and Things: The Payton Lectures Delivered in Condensed Form at the Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena 1951*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1967.