

Aurelius Augustine
On Free Choice of the Will
(De Libero Arbitrio)

This file consists of Two Parts:

Part 1

Nature of Truth relevant passages
of St. Augustine's *De Libero Arbitrio*
Pages 2-21

Part 2

The Nature of Truth interpreted
in light of the downfall of Empiricism
Pages 22-26

Aurelius Augustine
On Free Choice of the Will
Thomas Williams, Translator

Book Two

Books One and Three and several Sections of Book Two have been omitted since they have no bearing on the subject of the Nature of Truth.

Blue colored text is of most relevance to the study of the Nature of Truth.

Red colored text manifests serious philosophical errors in St. Augustine.

Sections 1-5 omitted

Section 6

AUGUSTINE: Our next subject is whether reason judges the inner sense. I won't ask whether reason is better than the inner sense, since I have no doubt that you think it is. And actually, I don't think we even need to ask whether reason judges the inner sense. Just consider all we know about the things that are below reason: material objects, the bodily senses, and the inner sense. How could we know that one is better than another, and that reason is more excellent than any of them, unless reason itself told us? And reason could not tell us this unless it judged all of these things.

EVODIUS: Clearly.

AUGUSTINE: So a nature that has existence but not life or understanding, like an inanimate body, is inferior to a nature that has both existence and life but not understanding, like the souls of animals; and such a thing is in turn inferior to something that has all three, like the rational mind of a human being. Given that, do you think that you could find anything in us— that is, anything that is part of our human nature— more excellent than understanding? It is clear that we have a body, as well as a sort of life by which the body is animated and nourished; both of these we find in animals. We also have a third thing, like the head or eye of the soul, or however reason and understanding might be more aptly described; and this, animals do not have. So I ask you: can you think of anything in human nature more exalted than reason?

EVODIUS: Nothing at all.

AUGUSTINE: What if we could find something that you were certain not only exists, but is more excellent than our reason? Would you hesitate to say that this thing, whatever it is, is God?

EVODIUS: Even if I found something better than the best part of my nature, I would not immediately say that it was God. What I call ‘God’ is not that to which my reason is inferior, but that to which nothing is superior.

AUGUSTINE: You’re quite right, for God himself has enabled your reason to think so piously and correctly about him. But if you found nothing above our reason except what is eternal and unchangeable, would you hesitate to call that ‘God’? For you know that material objects are changeable. It is obvious that the life by which the body is animated changes from one condition to another. And reason itself is clearly changeable: sometimes it strives for the truth and sometimes it doesn’t; sometimes it attains the truth and sometimes it doesn’t. If reason— not by any physical organ, not by touch or taste or smell, not by the ears or eyes or any sense inferior to itself, but by itself alone— sees something eternal and unchangeable, then it should confess that it is inferior, and that the eternal and unchangeable thing is its God.

EVODIUS: If we find that to which nothing is superior, I will certainly confess that it is God.

AUGUSTINE: Good. Then it will be enough for me to show that something of this sort exists, which you can admit to be God; or if something yet higher exists, you will concede that it is God. Therefore, whether there is something higher or not, it will be manifest that God exists, when I with his help fulfill my promise to prove that there is something higher than reason.

EVODIUS: Then show me your proof.

Section 7 omitted

Section 8

AUGUSTINE: Well then, tell me this. Can you think of anything that is common to all who think? I mean something that they all see with their own reason or mind, that is present to all but is not converted to the private use of those to whom it is present, as food and drink are, that remains unchanged and intact whether they see it or not? Or do you perhaps think that nothing like this exists?

EVODIUS: Actually, I see that there are many such things, but it will suffice to mention just one. The order and truth of number is present to all who think, so that those who make calculations try to grasp it by their own reason and understanding. Some can grasp it more easily than others can, but it offers itself equally to all who are capable of grasping it; unlike food, it is not transformed into a part of the one who perceives it. It is not at fault when someone makes a mistake; it remains true and complete, but the less one sees it, the greater is one's mistake.

AUGUSTINE: Quite right. Your quick reply shows that you are well acquainted with this subject. But suppose that someone told you that numbers are like images of visible things, that they are stamped on the soul, not by their own nature, but by the things that we perceive by the bodily senses. How would you respond? Would you agree?

EVODIUS: Not at all. 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. Moreover, when I perceive something with the bodily sense, such as the earth and sky and the other material objects that I perceive in them, I don't know how much longer they are going to exist. But I do know that seven plus three equals ten, not just now, but always; it never has been and never will be the case that seven plus three does not equal ten. I therefore said that this incorruptible truth of number is common to me and all who think.

AUGUSTINE: Your reply is perfectly true and quite certain, so I make no objection. But you will easily see that numbers are not perceived by

the bodily senses if you notice that each number is named on the basis of how many times it contains **one**. For example, if it contains **one** twice, it is called ‘two’, if three times, ‘three’, and if ten times, ‘ten’. For any number at all, its name will be the number of times that it contains **one**. But anyone who thinks correctly will surely find that **one** cannot be perceived by the bodily senses. Anything that is perceived by such a sense is clearly not **one** but many, for it is a material object and therefore has countless parts. I won’t even go into the minute and less complex parts, for any material object, however small, surely has a right and a left, a top and a bottom, a near side and a farther side, ends and a middle. We must admit that these parts are present in any material object, however tiny, and so we must concede that **no material object is truly and simply one**. And yet we could not enumerate so many parts unless we had some knowledge of what **one** is. For if I look for **one** in material objects and know that I have not found it, I must surely know what I was looking for and what I did not find there; indeed, I must know that it cannot be found there, or rather, that it is not there at all. And yet, if I did not know **one**, I could not distinguish many parts in material objects. **So where did I come to know this one that is not a material object? Wherever it was, I did not come to know it through the bodily senses;** the only things we know through the bodily senses are material objects, which we have found are not truly and simply **one**. Moreover, if we do not perceive **one** by the bodily sense, then we do not perceive any number by that sense, at least of those numbers that we grasp by the understanding. For every single one of them gets its name from the number of times that it contains **one**, which is not perceived by the bodily sense. The two halves of any material object together constitute the whole, but each half can in turn be divided in half. Thus, those two parts are in the object, but they are not strictly speaking **two**. But the number that is called **two** contains twice that which is strictly speaking **one**. Thus, its half— that which is strictly speaking **one**— cannot be further subdivided, because it is simply and truly **one**.

After **one** comes **two**, which is two times **one**; but it does not follow that after **two** comes two times **two**. The next number is three, and then comes four, which is two times **two**. This order extends to all numbers by a fixed and unchangeable law. Thus, the first number after **one** (which is the first of all numbers) is **two**, which is two times **one**. The second number after

two (which is the second number) is two times *two*— since the first number after *two* is three and the second number is four, which is two times *two*. The third number after three (which is the third number) is two times three— since the first number after three is four, the second number is five, and the third number is six, which is two times three. And the fourth number after the fourth number is twice that number; for the first number after four (which is the fourth number) is five, the second number is six, the third number is seven, and the fourth number is eight, which is two times four. And in all the rest you will find the same order that we found in the first two: however far any number is from the beginning, its double is in turn that far after it.

So we see that this order is fixed, secure, and unchangeable for all numbers. But how do we see this? No one perceives all the numbers by any bodily sense, for there are infinitely many of them. So where did we learn that this order extends to all of them? By what image or phantasm do we see so confidently this indisputable truth about number, which extends through infinitely many numbers? We see it by an inner light of which the bodily sense knows nothing.

For those inquirers to whom God has given the ability, whose judgment is not clouded by stubbornness, these and many other such examples suffice to show that **the order and truth of numbers has nothing to do with the senses of the body, but that it does exist, complete and immutable, and can be seen in common by everyone who uses reason.** Now **there are many other things that are present generally and publicly, as it were, to those who use reason, and these things remain inviolate and unchangeable even though they are perceived separately by the mind and reason of each person who perceives them.** Nonetheless, I do not object to the fact that the order and truth of number struck you most forcibly when you undertook to answer my question. It is no accident that Scripture associates number with wisdom: “I went around, I and my heart, that I might know and consider and seek after wisdom and **number.**” (Eccl. 7:25)

[St. Augustine mis-interpreted the Latin “rationem” as “number” instead of “reason.” The Hebrew word used here is best translated as “the reason or scheme of things,” as is done in the Greek Septuagint. This incorrect translation seems to be at the core of Augustine’s error of identifying wisdom (=truth) with number. Eccl. 7:26 in the Vulgate.]

Section 9

But then how do you think we ought to regard wisdom itself? Do you think that each human being has his own personal wisdom? Or, on the contrary, is there one single wisdom that is universally present to everyone, so that the more one partakes of this wisdom, the wiser one is?

EVODIUS: I am not yet altogether certain what you mean by ‘wisdom’, since I see that people have different views about what counts as wise in speech or action. Those who serve in wars think that they are acting wisely. Those who despise the military and devote their care and labor to farming think more highly of what they do, and call it wise. Those who are clever in thinking up money-making schemes consider themselves wise. Those who neglect or renounce all of this, and everything that is temporal, and devote all of their energy to searching for the truth so that they might come to know themselves and God, judge that their own actions are truly wise. Those who do not wish to give themselves up to the leisure of seeking and contemplating the truth but instead busy themselves with the tedious duties of looking after the interests of human beings, and work to ensure that human affairs are justly regulated and governed, think that they are wise. And then again, those who do both, who spend some of their time in contemplating the truth and some of their time in the tedious duties that they think are owed to human society, regard themselves as the winners in the competition for wisdom. I won’t even mention the countless sects, each of which holds that its own adherents are superior to everyone else, and that they alone are wise. Therefore, **since we have agreed to answer only on the basis of what we clearly know, and not on the basis of what we merely believe**, I cannot answer your question unless, in addition to believing, I know by reason and reflection what wisdom is.

AUGUSTINE: **But don’t you think that wisdom is nothing other than the truth in which the highest good is discerned and acquired?** All the different groups you mentioned seek good and shun evil; what divides them is that each has a different opinion about what is good. So whoever seeks what ought not to be sought is in error, even though he would not seek it unless he thought it was good. On the other hand, those who seek nothing at all, or who seek what they ought to seek, cannot be in error. Therefore, inso-

far as all human beings seek a happy life, they are not in error; but to the extent that someone strays from the path that leads to happiness— all the while insisting that his only goal is to be happy— to that extent he is in error, for ‘error’ simply means following something that doesn’t take us where we want to go.

Now the more one strays from the right path in life, the less wise one is, and so the further one is from the truth in which the highest good is discerned and acquired. But **when one follows and attains the highest good, one becomes happy**; and that, as we all agree, is precisely what we want. And so, just as it is obvious that we all want to be happy, it is also obvious that we all want to be wise, since no one can be happy without wisdom. For **no one is happy without the highest good, which is discerned and acquired in the truth that we call ‘wisdom’**. Therefore, just as there is a notion of happiness stamped on our minds even before we are happy— for by means of that notion we know confidently and say without hesitation that we want to be happy— so we have the notion of wisdom stamped on our minds even before we are wise. By means of that notion all of us, if asked whether we want to be wise, answer yes, without the slightest hesitation.

Now that we have agreed about what wisdom is, although perhaps you could not explain it in words (for if your soul could not perceive wisdom at all, you would have no way of knowing both that you will to be wise and that you ought to will this, which I feel sure you won’t deny), I want you to tell me whether wisdom, like the order and truth of number, is a single thing that presents itself to all who think; or rather, just as there are as many minds as there are human beings, so that I can see nothing of your mind and you can see nothing of mine, so there are as many wisdoms as there are potentially wise persons.

EVODIUS: If the highest good is one thing for everyone, then the truth in which that good is discerned and acquired must also be one thing that is common to all.

AUGUSTINE: **But do you doubt that the highest good, whatever it is, is one thing for all human beings?**

EVODIUS: Yes I do, because I see that different people take joy in different things as their highest good.

AUGUSTINE: I only wish that people were as certain about what the highest good is as they are about the fact that human beings cannot be happy unless they attain it. But that is a great question and might require a long discussion, so let's assume that there are as many different highest goods as there are different things that various people seek as their highest good. Surely it does not follow from that assumption that wisdom itself is not one and common to all, simply because the goods that human beings discern and choose in it are many and various. That would be like thinking that there must be more than one sun, simply because we perceive many and various things by its light. What in fact happens is that each person uses the will to choose which of these many things to enjoy looking at. One person prefers to look upon the height of a mountain, and rejoices at the sight, while another chooses the flatness of a plain, another the hollow of a valley, another the verdure of a forest, another the pulsing tranquility of the sea, and another uses some or all of these at once to contribute to his pleasure in seeing. And so there are many and various things that human beings see in the light of the sun and choose for their enjoyment, even though the light itself is a single thing in which each person's gaze sees and pursues what he will enjoy. So even supposing that there are many and various goods from which each person chooses what he wants, and that by seeing and pursuing that thing he rightly and truly constitutes it his highest good, it is still possible that the light of wisdom, in which those things can be seen and pursued, is a single thing, common to all the wise.

EVODIUS: I admit that it is possible; there's no reason why wisdom can't be a single thing common to all, even if there are many diverse highest goods. But I would like to know whether it is really so. Just because we admit that it's possible, we can't conclude that it is in fact the case.

AUGUSTINE: So, for the time being at least, we hold that wisdom exists; but we don't yet know whether it is a single thing that is common to all, or whether each wise person has his own wisdom, just as he has his own soul and his own mind.

EVODIUS: Exactly.

Section 10

AUGUSTINE: So we are agreed that wisdom exists, or at least that wise people exist, and that all human beings want to be happy. But where do we see this truth? For I have no doubt that you do see it, or that it is in fact true. Do you see this truth in the same way that you see your own thoughts, of which I am completely unaware unless you tell me about them? Or can I see it too, just as you understand it, even if I hear nothing about it from you?

EVODIUS: Clearly, you can see it too, even if I don't want you to.

AUGUSTINE: *So this one truth, which each of us sees with his own mind, is common to both of us.*

EVODIUS: Obviously.

AUGUSTINE: By the same token, I don't think you will deny that wisdom should be diligently sought after, and that this statement is in fact true.

EVODIUS: I am quite sure of that.

AUGUSTINE: Then this truth is a single truth that can be seen in common by all who know it. Nonetheless, each person sees it with his own mind— not with yours or mine or anyone else's— even though the truth that is seen is present in common to everyone who sees it.

EVODIUS: Exactly.

AUGUSTINE: Consider the following truths: *one ought to live justly; inferior things should be subjected to superior things; like should be compared with like; everyone should be given what is rightly his.* Don't you agree that these are true, and that they are present in common to me and you and all who see them?

EVODIUS: Yes.

AUGUSTINE: And *you surely could not deny that the uncorrupted is better than the corrupt, the eternal than the temporal, and the invulnerable than the vulnerable.*

EVODIUS: Could anyone?

AUGUSTINE: *Can anyone say that this truth is his own private possession, given that it is unchangeably present to be contemplated by all who are able to contemplate it?*

EVODIUS: No one could rightly say that it is his own, since it is as much one and common to all as it is true.

AUGUSTINE: Again, 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 and see that it is present in common to every mind that is capable of perceiving it?*

EVODIUS: You're quite right.

AUGUSTINE: And does anyone doubt that a life that cannot be swayed by any adversity from its fixed and upright resolve is better than one that is easily weakened and overthrown by transitory misfortunes?

EVODIUS: Who could doubt that?

AUGUSTINE: Then I won't look for more truths of this sort. It is enough that you too understand and concede that it is most certain that these rules, these lights of the virtues, are both true and unchangeable, and that they are present, either individually or collectively, to those who are able to see and contemplate them with their own mind and reason. But of course I must now ask whether you think that these truths are a part of wisdom. I'm sure you think that those who have attained wisdom are wise.

EVODIUS: Of course.

AUGUSTINE: Then consider those who live justly. Could they live thus unless they saw which inferior things to subject to which superior things, which like things to join to which, and which things to distribute to their rightful owners?

EVODIUS: No.

AUGUSTINE: And surely you will agree that someone who sees these things sees wisely.

EVODIUS: Yes.

AUGUSTINE: Now consider those who live in accordance with prudence. Do they not choose incorruption and recognize that it is to be preferred to corruption?

EVODIUS: Obviously.

AUGUSTINE: So when they choose the very thing that everyone admits they ought to choose, and turn their souls toward it, can it be denied that they choose wisely?

EVODIUS: I would certainly not deny it.

AUGUSTINE: So when they turn their souls toward that which they have wisely chosen, they are certainly turning them wisely.

EVODIUS: Absolutely.

AUGUSTINE: And those who are not deterred by any fear or punishment from that which they have wisely chosen, and toward which they have wisely turned, are undoubtedly acting wisely.

EVODIUS: Undoubtedly.

AUGUSTINE: Then it is utterly obvious that all of these truths that we called “rules” and “lights of the virtues” are part of wisdom, since the more one follows them and leads one’s life by them, the more one lives and acts wisely. And whatever is done wisely cannot rightly be considered separate from wisdom.

EVODIUS: Exactly.

AUGUSTINE: So, **just as there are true and unchangeable rules of numbers, whose order and truth you said are present unchangeably and in common to everyone who sees them, there are also true and unchangeable rules of wisdom.** When I asked you about a few of these rules one by one, you replied that they are true and obvious, and you conceded that they are present in common to be contemplated by all who are capable of seeing them.

Section 11

EVODIUS: I am quite certain of that. But I would very much like to know whether wisdom and number are both included in one single class. For as you have pointed out, **wisdom and number are associated with each other even in Holy Scripture**. Or perhaps one derives from the other or is contained in the other; for example, perhaps number derives from wisdom or is contained in wisdom. **I wouldn't dream of saying that wisdom is derived from number or is contained in number**. I don't know how that could be, for I have certainly known my share of mathematicians (or whatever you call those who are highly skilled at computation), but I have known very few who are wise— perhaps none at all— and **wisdom strikes me as being far nobler than number**.

AUGUSTINE: You have touched on a point that often astonishes me as well. For when I contemplate within myself the unchangeable truth of numbers and their lair (so to speak) and inner sanctuary or realm— or whatever else we might call their dwelling-place and home— I am far removed from material objects. I may, perhaps, find something that I can think about, but nothing that I can express in words. So in order to be able to say anything at all, I return in fatigue to familiar things and talk in the customary way about what is right in front of me. The same thing happens to me when I think as carefully and intently as I can about wisdom. So, **given the fact that both wisdom and number are contained in that most hidden and certain truth, and that Scripture bears witness that the two are joined together, I very much wonder why most people consider wisdom valuable but have little respect for number. They are of course one and the same thing**. Nevertheless, Scripture says of wisdom that “it reaches from end to end mightily and disposes all things sweetly.” (Wisdom 8:1) Perhaps the power that “reaches from end to end mightily” is number, and the power that “disposes all things sweetly” is wisdom in the strict sense, although both powers belong to one and the same wisdom.

Every material object, however mean, has its numbers; but **wisdom was granted, not to material objects or even to all souls, but only to rational souls**, as if it set up in them a throne from which to dispose all the things, however lowly, to which it gave numbers. But wisdom gave numbers to

everything, even to the lowliest and most far-flung things. Thus, **since we perceive the numbers that are stamped upon them**, we can easily make judgments about material objects as things ordered lower than ourselves. Consequently, we come to think that numbers themselves are also lower than we are, and we hold them in low esteem. **But when we begin to look above ourselves again, we find that numbers transcend our minds and remain fixed in the truth itself.** And **since few can be wise, but even fools can count**, people marvel at wisdom but disparage number. But the learned and studious, as they separate themselves more and more from earthly filth, come to see ever more clearly that **wisdom and number are united in the truth itself**, and they regard both as precious. In comparison with that truth, they consider everything else worthless— not just the silver and gold that human beings covet, but their very selves.

It should not surprise you that people honor wisdom and denigrate numbers, simply because it is easier to count than to be wise. For you see that they consider gold more precious than lamplight— and yet, in comparison with light, gold is a ridiculous trifle. People give greater honor to what is vastly inferior, simply because even a beggar has a lamp to light, while few have gold. **I don't mean to imply that wisdom is inferior to number, for they are the same thing**; but one needs an eye that can perceive that fact. Consider this analogy: light and heat are both perceived consubstantially, as it were, in the same fire; they cannot be separated from each other. Yet the heat affects only the things that are nearby, while the light is radiated far and wide. In the same way, the power of understanding that inheres in wisdom warms the things that are closest to it, such as rational souls; whereas things that are further off, such as material objects, are not touched by the heat of wisdom, but they are flooded with the light of numbers. This matter may still be unclear to you; after all, no visible image can be perfectly analogous to something invisible. Nonetheless, you should notice this one point, which will suffice to answer the question that we set out to consider, and which is obvious even to lowly minds like ours. Even if we cannot be certain whether number is a part of wisdom or is derived from wisdom, or whether wisdom itself is a part of number or is derived from number, or whether both are names for a single thing, **it is certainly clear that both are true, and indeed unchangeably true.**

Section 12

So you cannot deny the existence of an unchangeable truth that contains everything that is unchangeably true. And you cannot claim that this truth is yours or mine or anyone else's; it is present and reveals itself in common to all who discern what is unchangeably true, like a light that is public and yet strangely hidden. But if it is present in common to all who reason and understand, who could think that it belongs exclusively to the nature of any one of them? I'm sure you remember what we discussed earlier about the bodily senses. The things that we perceive in common by the sense of the eyes and ears, such as colors and sounds that both of us see or hear, do not belong to the nature of our eyes or ears; rather, they are present in common for both of us to perceive. So you would never say that the things that you and I both perceive, each with his own mind, belong to the nature of my mind or of yours. When two people see the same thing with their eyes, you cannot say that they are seeing the eyes of one or the other of them, but some third thing at which both of them are looking.

EVODIUS: That is quite obviously true.

AUGUSTINE: Well then, what do you think of this truth we have been discussing for so long, in which we see so many things? Is it more excellent than our minds, or equal to them, or even inferior to them? If it were inferior, we would make judgments about it, not in accordance with it, just as we make judgments about material objects because they are below us. We often say, not just that they are a certain way, but that they ought to be that way. The same is true of our souls: we often know, not merely that they are a certain way, but that they ought to be that way. We make such judgments about material objects when we say that something is not as white as it ought to be, or not as square, and so on. But we say that a soul is less capable than it ought to be, or less gentle, or less forceful, depending on our own character. 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. When someone says that eternal things are better than temporal things, or that seven plus three equals ten, no one says that it ought to be so. We simply recognize that it is so; we are like explorers who rejoice in what they have discovered, not like inspectors who have to put things right.

Furthermore, if this truth were equal to our minds, it too would be changeable. For our minds see the truth better at some times than at others, which shows that they are indeed changeable. But the truth makes no progress when we see it better and suffers no setback when we see it less. It remains whole and undefiled, giving the joy of its light to those who turn toward it but inflicting blindness on those who turn away. Why, we even make judgments about our own minds in accordance with that truth, while we can in no way make judgments about it. We say that a mind does not understand as much as it ought to, or that it understands just as much as it ought to. And the more a mind can be turned toward the unchangeable truth and cleave to it, the more it ought to understand.

Therefore, since the truth is neither inferior nor equal to our minds, we can conclude that it is superior to them and more excellent than they are.

Section 13

But I had promised, if you recall, that I would prove that there is something more sublime than our mind and reason. [Here it is: the truth itself. Embrace it, if you can; enjoy it; “delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” \(Psalm 36 {or 37}:4\)](#) What more can you desire than happiness? And what greater happiness can there be than to enjoy the unshakable, unchangeable, and most excellent truth?

People cry out that they are happy when they passionately embrace the beautiful bodies of their spouses, and even of prostitutes; and shall we doubt that we are happy in embracing the truth? People cry out that they are happy when, with throats parched by the heat, they come upon a wholesome and abundant spring, or when they are starving and find an elaborate feast; and shall we deny that we are happy when our thirst is quenched and our hunger appeased by the truth itself? We often hear voices crying out that they are happy if they lie among roses or other flowers, or enjoy the incomparable scent of the finest perfumes; what is more fragrant, more delightful, than the gentle breath of truth? And shall we doubt that we are happy when it breathes upon us? Many find their happiness in the music of voices and strings and flutes. When they are without it, they think they are miserable; and when they have it, they are in raptures. So when the silent eloquence of truth flows over us without the clamor of voices, shall we look for some other happiness, and not enjoy

the one that is so secure and so near at hand? People take pleasure in the cheerfulness and brightness of light— in the glitter of gold and silver, in the brilliance of gems, and in the radiance of colors and of that very light that belongs to our eyes, whether in earthly fires or in the stars or the sun or the moon. As long as no poverty or violence deprives them of this joy, they think that they are happy; they want to live forever to enjoy such a happiness. And shall we fear to find our happiness in the light of truth?

No! **Rather, since the highest good is known and acquired in the truth, and that truth is wisdom, let us enjoy to the full the highest good, which we see and acquire in that truth.** For those who enjoy the highest good are happy indeed. This truth shows forth all good things that are true, holding them out to be grasped by whoever has understanding and chooses one or many of them for his enjoyment. Now think for a moment of those who choose what pleases them in the light of the sun and take joy in gazing upon it. If only their eyes were livelier and sound and exceptionally strong, they would like nothing better than to look directly upon the sun, which sheds its light even on the inferior things that weaker eyes delight in. It is just the same with a strong and lively mind. Once it has contemplated many true and unchangeable things with the sure eye of reason, it turns to the truth itself, by which all those true things are made known. It forgets those other things and cleaves to the truth, in which it enjoys them all at once. For whatever is delightful in the other true things is especially delightful in the truth itself.

This is our freedom, when we are subject to the truth; and the truth is God himself, who frees us from death, that is, from the state of sin. For that truth, speaking as a human being to those who believe in him, says, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32) For the soul enjoys nothing with freedom unless it enjoys it securely.

Section 14

Now no one is secure in enjoying goods that can be lost against his will. But no one can lose truth and wisdom against his will, for no one can be separated from the place where they are. What we called separation from truth and wisdom is really just a perverse will that loves inferior things, and no one wills something unwillingly. We can all enjoy it equally and

in common; there is ample room, and it lacks for nothing. It welcomes all of its lovers without envy; it belongs to them all but is faithful to each. No one says to another, "Step back so that I too can get close; let go of it so that I too can embrace it." They all cleave to it; they all touch it. No one tears off a piece as his own food; you drink nothing from it that I cannot also drink. For what you gain from that communion does not become your own private property; it remains intact for me. When you breathe it in, I need not wait for you to give it back so that I can breathe it too. No part of it ever becomes the private property of any one person; it is always wholly present to everyone.

Therefore, the things that we touch or taste or smell are less similar to this truth than are the things that we hear and see. For every word that is heard is heard simultaneously and in its entirety by everyone who hears it, and any form that is seen by the eyes is seen equally by every eye that sees it. But these things bear only a very distant resemblance to the truth. For no sound exists all at once; every sound is produced in time and is distended in time, and one part of it is heard after another. And every visible form is extended in place and does not exist as a whole in any one place.

Moreover, any of these things can surely be taken away from us against our will, and there are many obstacles that keep us from enjoying them fully. For example, even if someone could sing a beautiful song that never came to an end, and those who were keen on it came eagerly to hear it, they would crowd together and fight for the places nearest the singer. And even then, they could not hold on forever to what they heard; the sounds would reach them and then vanish. Even if I wanted to look at the sun and could do so with an unflinching eye, it would desert me at sunset or when it was hidden by a cloud; and many other things would interfere with my pleasure in seeing the sun, and so I would lose it against my will. Besides, even supposing that I could always see a brilliant light or hear a beautiful sound, what would that profit me? I would have that in common with beasts.

But to the will that steadfastly desires to enjoy it, **the beauty of truth and wisdom is not obscured by the crowds of eager listeners. It is not used up in the course of time; it does not move from place to place. Night does not cover it, and no shadow hides it. The bodily senses do not perceive**

it. It is near to those in all the world who turn themselves toward it and love it. It is eternally present with them all. It is not in any place, but it is present everywhere. It warns outwardly and teaches inwardly. It changes for the better all those who see it, and no one changes it for the worse. No one judges it, but apart from it no one judges rightly. And so it is clear beyond any doubt that this one truth, by which people become wise, and which makes them judges, not of it, but of other things, is better than our minds.

Section 15

Now you had conceded that if I proved the existence of something higher than our minds, you would admit that it was God, as long as there was nothing higher still. I accepted this concession, and said that it would be enough if I proved that there is something higher than our minds. For if there is something more excellent than the truth, then that is God; if not, the truth itself is God. So in either case you cannot deny that God exists, and that was the very question that we had agreed to discuss. Perhaps it occurs to you that, according to the teaching of Christ that we have accepted in faith, Wisdom has a Father. (Cf. 1 Cor. 1:24) But remember another thing that we have accepted in faith: the Wisdom that is begotten of the eternal Father is equal to him. That is not a matter for dispute right now; we must hold it with unshaken faith. For there is indeed a God, and he exists truly and in the highest degree. No longer is this a truth that we merely hold with unhesitating faith; we have achieved an unerring, although extremely superficial, form of knowledge. This is enough to enable us to explain the other things that relate to our question, unless you have some objection to make.

EVODIUS: I am so overwhelmed with joy that I cannot express it in words. I accept what you say; indeed, I cry out that it is most certain. But I cry out inwardly, hoping to be heard by the truth itself and to cleave to it. For I recognize that it is not merely one good among others; it is the highest good, the good that makes us happy.

AUGUSTINE: You do well to feel such joy—I too am rejoicing greatly. But I ask you, are we already happy and wise? Or are we merely on our way?

EVODIUS: I think we are merely on our way.

AUGUSTINE: Then how do you understand these certain truths that make you cry out for joy? And how do you know that they belong to wisdom? Can a fool know wisdom?

EVODIUS: Not as long as he remains a fool.

AUGUSTINE: So either you are wise, or you do not yet know wisdom.

EVODIUS: I'm not yet wise, but I wouldn't say that I am a fool either, since I do know wisdom. For I can't deny that the things I know are certain or that they belong to wisdom.

AUGUSTINE: But Evodius, wouldn't you agree that someone who is not just is unjust, and someone who is not prudent is imprudent, and someone who is not temperate is intemperate? Or is there some room for doubt on these matters?

EVODIUS: I agree that when someone is not just he is unjust; and I would say the same thing about prudence and temperance.

AUGUSTINE: So when someone is not wise, isn't he a fool?

EVODIUS: Yes, I agree with that too. When someone is not wise he is a fool.

AUGUSTINE: Well then, which are you?

EVODIUS: Call me whichever you like. I wouldn't dream of saying that I am wise, so given what I have just agreed to, I see that I must admit to being a fool.

AUGUSTINE: [Then a fool knows wisdom](#). For as we said before, you could not be certain that you willed to be wise, and that you ought to do so, unless a notion of wisdom was present in your mind. The same is true of the things that you said in response to each of my questions, things that belong to wisdom itself and that you rejoiced to understand.

EVODIUS: Exactly.

Sections 16-20 omitted

The following excerpts from Sections 16-20 give evidence of the fact that Augustine did not understand the implications of “Truth is God.”

Section 16:

Now pass beyond the mind of the craftsman to see **eternal number**.

Whatever changeable thing you may look at, you could not grasp it at all, either by the sense of the body or by the contemplation of the mind, unless it had some form composed of numbers, without which it would sink into nothing. Therefore, do not doubt that there is an eternal and unchangeable form that sees to it that these changeable things do not perish, but pass through time in measured motions and a distinct variety of forms, like the verses of a song. This eternal form has no bounds; although it is diffused everywhere, it is not extended in place, and it does not change in time. But through it all changeable things can be formed, and thus they complete and carry out the numbers of times and places in the way appropriate to things of their class.

Section 19:

But truth and wisdom are common to all, and all who are wise and happy become so by cleaving to truth and wisdom.

Section 20:

So if you see anything at all that has measure, number, and order, do not hesitate to attribute it to God as craftsman. If you take away all measure, number, and order, there is absolutely nothing left.

First posting April 2010

Edited and added emphases May 2011

The Nature of Truth

St. Augustine's definition of Truth re-interpreted in light of the downfall of Empiricism.

We begin by admitting that we do not have a definition for the word Truth. Yet we need to use the word in our attempt to define it. Therefore, we have no choice but to begin with an intuitive concept of Truth. Let us begin by assuming that Truth is the property of sentences whose meanings correspond with “facts” out in the “real” world.

1. Truth Exists

It is self-defeating to deny the existence of truth. If someone claims that “Truth does not exist,” then we can counter by asking if the claim is True or False. If the claim is False, then Truth Exists, and if the claim is True, then Truth Exists.

2. Truth is Unchangeable

It is impossible for truth to change. What is true today always has been and always will be true. All true propositions are immutable truths. Pragmatic views of truth that imply that what is true today may be false tomorrow are untenable. If truth changes, then pragmatism will be untrue tomorrow, if indeed it could ever be true.

3. Truth is Eternal

By extension of its Unchangeable nature, Truth must be Eternal. Even if every created thing ceases to exist, Truth will continue to exist. But suppose someone asks, “What if truth itself should someday perish?” Then the truth that “Truth has perished” would still exist eternally. Any denial of the eternity of truth turns out to be an affirmation of its eternity.

4. Truth is Spiritual

The existence of truth presupposes the existence of minds. Without a mind, truth could not exist. The object of knowledge is a meaningful thought which resides in one or more minds.

a. Truth is Not a function of Matter.

The existence of truth is incompatible with any materialistic view of man. Materialists believe that all thinking and reasoning is merely the result of the random motion of particles in the brain. But one set of relative physical motions is not truer than another set. Therefore, if there is no mind, there can be no truth; and if there is no truth, materialism cannot be true.

Truth cannot be a function of the position of material objects because if a thought was the result of some physical motion in the brain, no two persons could have the same thought. A physical motion is a fleeting event different

from every other motion. Two persons could not have the same random motion, nor could one person have the same random motion twice.

b. Truth is Not a function of Time.

If thoughts were the result of physical motions in the brain, memory and communication would be impossible. We are able to recall the past because we have minds and not because of the motion of particles in our brains. Thus, if one is able to think the same thought twice, truth must be independent of time.

c. Truth is Not a function of Space.

Truth is independent of Space as well. Not only does truth defy time and matter; it defies space as well. For communication to be possible between two or more people, the identical truth must be in two or more minds at the same time. If, in opposition, anyone wished to deny that an immaterial idea can exist in two different minds at the same time, his denial must be conceived to exist in his own mind only; and since it has not registered in any other mind, it does not occur to us to refute it!

5. Truth is Superior to the human mind

By its very nature, truth cannot be subjective and individualistic. Truth is immutable, but the human mind is changeable. Even though beliefs vary from one person to another, truth itself cannot change. Moreover, the human mind does not stand in judgment of truth; but rather, truth judges our reason.

While we sometimes judge other human minds (as when we say, for example, that someone's mind is not as keen as it should be), we do not judge truth.

If truth and the human mind were equal, truth could not be eternal and immutable since the human mind is finite, mutable, and subject to error.

Therefore, truth must transcend human reason; truth must be superior to any individual human mind as well as to the sum total of human minds. From this it follows that there must be a mind higher than the human mind in which truth resides.

6. Truth is God

We have seen that Truth exists, is unchangeable, eternal, spiritual, and is superior to the human mind. But only God possesses these attributes. If we substitute the word "God" for the word "Truth" in the list of attributes, we see that:

God Exists

God is Unchangeable

God is Eternal

God is Spiritual

God is not a function of Space, Time or Matter.

God is Superior to the human mind.

These attributes apply equally to Truth and God, and only to Truth and God.
Truth and God are identical.

No created thing possesses the attributes of Truth or God. There can be no True propositions about created entities, including numbers, geometric patterns or so called “laws” of science because they are all dependent on Space, Time or Matter.

The only true propositions are about God.
In other words, Knowing Truth is Knowing God,
that is, Knowing Truth is being indwelt by God.

Truth is Knowledge of God.

Truth is God.

But what could that possibly mean? How are we to interpret such a potent proposition?

To interpret that sentence, we must understand the several different ways that the word IS is used.**

The word IS can have FOUR possible meanings.

1- The IS of Existence

e.g. “God is”, meaning “God Exists.” The word IS can be replaced by the word Exists, and the meaning of the sentence remains unchanged.

2- The IS of Predication

e.g. “Laura is Beautiful,” meaning that Beauty is an attribute, quality or characteristic of Laura. The function of predication is to identify individuals and attribute properties to them. It is one of the primary properties of language.

3- The IS of Class-Inclusion

e.g. “Lisa is Married,” means that Lisa belongs to a Class of people who are Married.

4- The IS of Identity

e.g. “Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens.”

In this sentence, we can replace the word IS with the phrase “is the same as”. The meaning of the sentence is clearer if we say “Mark Twain is the same person as Samuel Clemens.”

Since the Subject and the Identicate* are both names for the same person, their transposition does not alter the meaning of the sentence.

e.g. “Samuel Clemens is Mark Twain.”

We can now examine our definition of the word Truth.

When we say that “Truth is God,” which of the Four meanings of IS, is the word *is*?

- 1- “Truth is God” cannot mean Truth Exists. Replacing the word *is* with the word *Exists* does not make sense. This meaning of IS, is not what we mean.
- 2- “Truth is God” is Not a Predication about Truth. God is Not an attribute, quality or characteristic of Truth. This meaning of IS, is not what we mean.
- 3- “Truth is God” does NOT mean that Truth belongs to a Class of things (or beings) called God. This meaning of IS, is not what we mean.
- 4- The only other choice we are left with is that “Truth is God” means that Truth and God are IDENTITIES. Truth and God are two different names for the same “thing.” We can restate it as “Truth is the same as God” and we have done no damage to the meaning of “Truth is God.” In addition, we can transpose the subject and the identicate to “God is Truth” and we see that we still have a logical and meaningful sentence.

We have thus shown that the words Truth and God are IDENTICAL.

At the same time we are bounded by this new Identity. We cannot use the word Truth as a Property of sentences that do not refer to God.

True sentences are about God only.
Knowing Truth is knowing God!

A Clarification

When I first published my findings on this website, I named the new Theory the One True Proposition (1TP) Theory. I had proceeded on the belief that Truth was the property of propositions.

We often use the word truth, and assume that we are certifying or validating a statement that we have made. It is very difficult to avoid this practice. But it is an error. It is now clear to me that Truth is NOT the property of Propositions. Truth is a synonym for God. Even the word synonym is misleading here, since it literally means “same name.” Because the word “God” is not a name but a Title, its Syntitle cannot be a name but must be a Title.

Many religions use the word “God” to refer to the one who created the universe, an omniscient, omnipotent being. But that does not tell us much. We need to have the

name of this God to be able to relate to him. By having only His Title, He becomes a more distant being than a person whose Name we know.

To refer to him as God is similar to referring to the President of a company whose name we do not know. We might be able to say a great deal about him because we see the results of his commands. “The president has given everyone a day off” or “The president has hired a new staff.” But we can still be in the dark as to who this president is!

“Truth” is a Syn-title for God.

Truth is a Title of Office, just as God is a Title of office. It is not the name of a person but a Title.

* I find it necessary to create this new word to differentiate Identification from Predication.

** This analysis is based upon the work of Gottlob Frege, who brought up to date grammatical analyses begun by Plato and Aristotle.

Augustine’s definition of Truth as given in his *De Libero* Book II, edited and reinterpreted; after the work of Ronald Nash in *Faith & Reason*, and the work of Gordon Clark in *A Christian View of Men and Things*.