

Augustine and skepticism thesis example

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Augustine and Skepticism

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While philosophical skepticism had many adherents during the ancient and Hellenistic periods, Augustine's three refutations of total skepticism made it a less common topic of intellectual interest during the dark ages. Initially, Augustine had a strong inclination towards skepticism that states nothing can be known. However, it was Plotinus and Plato's teachings that enabled him to refute skepticism.

Augustine refutes skepticism through the principle of non-contradiction. He states both a proposition and its contradiction cannot be true. For instance, the proposal a stick is straight and the notion the stick is not straight cannot both be held true. This is because the stick cannot be straight and not straight at the same time. Secondly, Augustine notes that when one doubts his or her own existence, the act itself absolutely discloses that one certainly exists. Lastly, Augustine states that sense perception gives us rudimentary knowledge. Deception in sense perception is when we assent to the fact of appearance that is far from reality. For instance, it is true that a stick appears merely bent at the point it submerges into water, however, if we assent that the stick is bent from its appearance then we fall into error.

The strength and validity of the refutations is subject to debate.

Consequently, skepticism became a viable position during the Renaissance. Contemporary philosophers' note that Augustine fails to address the unique line of reasoning used by Sextus Empiricus who argues knowledge is true if good ground exists for believing that what is, is exactly as we perceive it to

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be. This is not the case since we can never be aware of objects independent of us. We can only perceive the objects in relationship to us.

Reference

Philosophers of the Hellenistic and Christian Eras (Chapter 5)