

[From the personal papers of Gordon H. Clark]

Although Gordon Haddon Clark is probably the least known in England of the philosophers considered in this study, he was appointed to the chair of philosophy at Butler University, Indianapolis in 1945, following when most of his major publications have appeared. Clark would no doubt claim that his epistemology is that of a dogmatist, an unfortunate sounding position described and defended in his book *Three Types of Religious Philosophy* (1), but whilst preferring to be known for his 'rationality' he nevertheless has accepted that his work is broadly in the rationalist tradition (2) and that he holds a coherence theory of truth, and it is this feature which gives him a place in this present work.

Although his theory of truth falls within that broadly described as coherence this does not mean that he would advocate a monolithic doctrine of coherence covering both definitional and criterial uses of truth. It is possible to recognise in his work that there is a distinction to be drawn between coherence as a definition of truth and coherence as a criterion of truth. Whilst he argues for the view that the test of the truth of a propositions is its coherence with other propositions, he does not thereby argue that coherence is also the meaning of truth. This distinction is one that is familiar to advocates of a coherence theory, often being made to allow room for both a coherence theory and a correspondence theory of truth. In Nicolas Rescher's words, 'The two doctrines are fitted to very different work. The matter of 'correspondence to facts' tells us a great deal about what truth is, but can fail badly as a guide to what is true. On the other hand, the factor of 'coherence with other (suitably determined) propositions' does not really provide a definition of truth' (3). It would be a mistake to assume that Clark accepts such a distinction in order to make room for a correspondence theory. His views on such a theory can be put briefly and pointedly, 'If the mind has something which only corresponds to reality, it does not have reality; and if it knows reality, there is no need for an extra something which corresponds to it' (4). In this respect Clark's position is similar to that of Otto Neurath, who in writing of sets of scientific statements, makes the point that, 'There is no place for an empirical question: Which is the true set? but only whether the social scientists ... should work with one of these comprehensive sets' (5). As we shall see Clark uses the idea of a coherent system of propositions to make a metaphysical point about the nature of reality, and it is in relation to the metaphysical significance of coherence that the definition is derived. It is primarily then in connection with a criterial

view and metaphysical doctrine that Clark advances his views.

Clark's account refers specifically and only to propositions. To refer to non-propositional truth is meaningless, as is the attribution of truth to mental acts of belief. To make such moves is to neglect our common use of language in which it is always appropriate to ask 'what is true?', and Clark's answer is that 'nothing can be called true in the literal sense of the term except the attribution of a predicate to a subject' (6). Any rejection of such a claim is met by Clark asking for an account of 'unpropositional truth' and for evidence of its truth. This same appeal to the common use of language denies the appropriateness of truth claims for concepts or ideas (7). To attribute truth to a noun is a literal nonsense which is removed if the truth claim is made of a predicated noun.

Now for Clark, the truth of a proposition will give a coherence with other true propositions and a logical incompatibility with false propositions. 'Instead of a series of disconnected propositions, truth will be a rational system, a logically ordered series, somewhat like geometry with its theorems and axioms, its implications and presuppositions. And each part will derive its significance from the whole'(8). Such a statement is in general harmony with other descriptions of the coherentist position (9), and to the extent to which he offers this general statement of his view of truth Clark is recognisably orthodox. Here are however a number of points at which his theory deviates from that held by others, and this can be seen in the way in which Clark deals with some of the problems attendant on a coherence theory.

One of the difficulties in the theory is that of determining the truth of the claim that a coherence theory is true (10). Unless such a claim is known to be true independently of its coherence with other propositions, then how can such coherence show it is true? In other words, unless we have knowledge of the truth of the coherence criterion, we have no grounds for holding that coherent systems of propositions are to be held to be true. One way of avoiding what appears to be a vicious circularity is to follow a procedure such as that used by Rescher and make a distinction between logical and extra-logical truths. By logical truths, Rescher means not merely those to be derived by inference but also definitional and conceptual truths. He argues that a coherence theory should be so constructed as to apply only to the traditional truths of fact, that is, extra-logical truths. Logical truths on the other hand, would then be established by some other means. Now if Rescher can justify such a move, and can

further justify including the principle of coherence in the category of logical truths, then the problem of circularity will be removed in that the truth of the principle will not itself be subject to the criterion of coherence but to other criteria, and in Rescher's case to pragmatic considerations (11).

If such a move is valid and can be sustained the circularity will no longer be a problem, but it will be removed at the cost of reducing the significance of coherence from being a universal criterion to being one of partial application. A further difficulty arises then if Rescher's distinction is accepted, for he is allowing that there may be criteria of truth other than that of coherence. He seeks to apply different criteria to different types of proposition, but there are some questions to be asked about the procedure. In placing truth claims about the coherence theory in the category of logical truths, one is entitled to ask what justifies such a move and Rescher's answer would appear to be the pragmatic one that to get any use of the theory it must be barred from the category of extra-logical truths. As there appears to be only two categories it follows it must be a logical truth, though precisely what is intended by this categorization is not clear. Rescher's position then, is one of limited commitment to the coherence theory. This can be further seen in his discussion of Brand Blanshard's attempt to identify coherence as a statement of the nature of truth with coherence as criterion for truth, where Rescher appeals to the distinction between guaranteeing and authorizing criteria and his argument against Blanshard turns on his rejection of coherence as a guaranteeing criterion (12). That is to say that he denies that coherence is 'absolutely decisive for the feature' (13) of truth, but holds the weaker thesis that it merely gives rational warrant for accepting a truth claim. It is an authorizing criterion.

This weaker thesis has the virtue of allowing possible solutions to some of the problems surrounding a coherence theory but it raises other. Not only does Rescher make the theory subject to a further criterion of truth, but he also opens the way for the existence of a conflict between truth claims derived from the criterion of coherence and those derived from another source. 'Suppose that we have a very partial and limited but yet basic and reliable means for truth determination that yields P1, P2, ... Pn, Q as true. However, when we examine the matter from a coherence standpoint we find that what best coheres with P1, P2, ... Pn is actually some R that is incompatible with Q' (14). It is interesting to note that he proceeds to claim that coherence must agree with the results derived from this 'basic' means for truth determination. In presenting this argument, the further point is made that if it is accepted that there is a possibility that incorrect truth claims may be made for propositions, then a proposition may

qualify as a truth only to be found on further or more careful consideration to be false. There would seem to be some confusion in making this latter point in the context of the discussion of the two criteria for it is a further question as to how accurately one may apply the coherence criterion, and it rests strangely with the issue of the presence of two criteria and their order of ascendancy. The application of the coherence theory will be considered later, but for the moment two points fundamental to Rescher's position can be identified and used to highlight Gordon Clark's views:

1. that the coherence theory itself is to be justified by a further theory, and
2. that coherence between propositions does not allow truth claims to be afforded certainty, but simply indicates that they are hypotheses which the claimant has rational authority for holding as true.

Clark's view of the coherence theory is at variance with both. The starting point of Clark's epistemology is that truth is attainable, a statement which is verifiable by considering the contrary, namely that truth is unattainable, for if it is true that truth is unattainable then at least one truth has been established (15). The argument itself is a familiar one and unexceptional, but having pointed out that the proposition under discussion is false because it is internally self-contradictory Clark proceeds to develop the point to suggest that coherence, in the sense of self-consistency, is not only a necessary condition of a true proposition but also of sets of propositions. In this way he claims that 'the absolute idealism of Hegel, the dialectical materialism of Marx, the systems of Berkeley and Bergson' may all be scrutinised for inconsistency and hence for the truth of the set(16). Hence a *reductio ad absurdum* is seen as the test of the truth of the sets. It is clear then that not only is the application of the law of contradiction to be seen as a criterial method of establishing truth, but in so far as truth requires self-consistency or coherence between true propositions, that is, that a true proposition cannot be internally self-contradictory, and sets of true propositions cannot be contradictory. It is the nature of true propositions that they exhibit coherence both between themselves and within each proposition.

This point is of some importance in that it is precisely here that Rescher challenges Blanshard. He asks, 'Why ... should coherence not be accepted as a generally effective test of truth rather than an inescapable aspect of its nature?'. The question could be asked of Clark as well as of Blanshard, and his answer is to the point of the inescapability of coherence (consistency) for the existence of any true

proposition. Unless coherence is an inescapable aspect of its nature there can be no truth in the sense that the law of contradiction is a necessary element in both the formulation and verification of a truth claim.

A possible source of this difficulty in Rescher's work is in his use of two functions of a criterion – guaranteeing and authorizing, within the context of defining truth. He would seem to be using criterial functions as a means of making the definition, but there is no inconsistency in accepting the functions which indicate the degree of certainty as to the coherence, whilst at the same time maintaining that the nature and definition are of logical necessity of coherence. There would appear to be no contradiction in saying that whilst truth is defined as coherence, it is still possible to view the strength of evidence of coherence as giving rational warrant for accepting the truth of propositions.

It could be argued against Clark that whilst coherence may well provide grounds for holding the certainty of a proposition, it is nevertheless the case that some truths change, for example contingent truths dependent upon time. There are occasions when such truths do not cohere with other true propositions and they cannot be said to be certain. Nevertheless, Clark still holds that true propositions are certain and unchangeable though it is necessary to consider them within their temporal context. True propositions dependent upon a time factor are only adequately expressed with the time limitation stated. We normally omit it and hence give the impression that truth is a feature of a proposition which is changeable. A correct formulation will make clear the apparent relativism (18).

It will be recalled that Clark's method requires the examination of various sets of propositions in order that their coherence might be established, but it is a further step to go on to argue that such a procedure will lead to one single set of coherent propositions. It is indisputable that on Clark's account there cannot be two sets of propositions which are both internally consistent and mutually contradictory, but there is no inconsistency in postulating two sets which are internally consistent and in harmony with one another. This is not necessarily because it is difficult to spot the contradictions between them, but it may be that they simply are mutually consistent.

If such a state of affairs is logically possible, how can the coherence theory as advanced by Clark be justified? Although not developing the idea in detail, Clark hints that the strength of his theory may be

shown by applying the criterion of coherence to rival theories and showing that they lead to scepticism (19). Had the proposal been made of Rescher's account of coherence it would have simply indicated that the coherence theory is not the same as say, the correspondence theory or the pragmatic theory, but it needs to be remembered that on Clark's account incoherence entails that the proposition concerned is internally self contradictory and it is this feature that needs to be shown in rival theories.

The pragmatic theory is dealt with easily in that Clark holds that truth is immutable. The pragmatist on the other hand, seeks to defend a view that truth may be false tomorrow, and may have been false yesterday. But this is to say that the theory itself cannot be said to be true, in that it too may be false tomorrow, yet it is in the sense of absolutism which makes the theory plausible in the first place. In Clark's words, 'this or that hypothesis may be tentatively accepted for a limited period; but if all statements without exception are tentative, significant speech has become impossible'. Any relativist epistemology makes truth claims which by the nature of its ultimate scepticism cannot be accepted (20).

Clark's approach to the correspondence theory has already been mentioned and as with pragmatism, so here he seems to be arguing that the position is self-contradictory. In saying that 'if the mind has something which only corresponds to reality, it does not have reality', Clark seems to be assuming that the theory presupposes that it is only possible to know something which has a relationship of correspondence with reality, but that this is not to know reality. If, and this is a further step, reality is unknowable, then we seem to have a position of scepticism, in which case we have another instance of self-contradiction in that it is contradictory to hold that we can know that knowledge is unattainable. It would be foolish to read too much into the little Clark has written on this theory, and it may be argued that his published view of correspondence does not take account of the more sophisticated accounts that have marked recent philosophy (21), but nevertheless it is possible to indicate the lines along which Clark's rejection of the theory might go (22).

Whilst Clark does not specifically use it as an argument it is clear that according to his account coherence as the theory of truth does not require further justification. Coherence is that which is logically consistent and as such is an explication of the law of contradiction. To deny this law is to imply precisely the inconsistency and self-contradiction which bars a proposition from acceptance as a truth claim. In so far that this version of the coherence theory rests on the use of the law of

contradiction, it is this law that requires justification. It might be argued that such a law is simply a convenient convention of western thought, but for Clark it represents an ultimate principle which is axiomatic for human thought and discourse. In reply to any who would question this position, there are two replies to be made. Firstly, and who would deny such a claim must themselves use the very principle which they claim to reject, for to make any significant statement is to use words in accordance with the law. 'Each term must refer to something definite and at the same time there must be some objects to which it does not refer. ... One cannot write a book or speak a sentence that means anything without using the law of contradiction' (23), for 'if contradictory statements are true of the same subject at the same time, evidently all things will be the same thing' (24). The second reply is related to the first and is that the use of the law of contradiction is a necessary condition for meaningful discourse because it is basically a law of being whose logical form is derivative (25). This position arises from the starting point of the first reply, namely that the laws of logic are necessary for propositions to be true. It then follows that 'since truth requires a relation to reality, the laws of logic must be not only the laws of thought, but the laws of reality as well' (26).

It may be objected that this is simply invoking a correspondence theory after all, but Clark would seem to make a distinction between the law of contradiction being a law of reality, and the law of contradiction corresponding to a law of reality. One is Clark's coherence and the other a form of correspondence theory. It is the latter with its attempt to state a relationship between two disparate elements, that Clark rejects; and the former statement of the logical entailment of reality that he accepts and propounds.

If any would still ask that such an ultimate principle be proved, then Clark has no reply; but neither does he accept that there can be a reply. As Ronald Nash aptly comments, 'In order for ultimate principles like the law of contradiction to be proved, they would either have to be deduced from other principles (in which case they would no longer be ultimate) or from themselves (in which case the supposed argument would be circular and not really a proof)' (27).

In contrast to Rescher's claim that the coherence theory itself is to be justified by a further theory, we have to conclude that Clark's views the coherence theory as being self-justifying. Whilst he suggests that there may be a justification on the pragmatic grounds that it is the only consistent position to adopt,

even this would rest on the use of the law of contradiction as integral to the theory, this law having ontological status which makes it axiomatic to all discourse. Rescher's claim takes it strength from separating logic and coherence, a move that Clark rejects.

The second feature of Rescher's theory which was identified was that coherence between propositions does not allow truth claims to be afforded certainty, but simply indicates that they are hypotheses which the claimant has authority for holding as true. As already indicated, it is logically possible that two or more systems of propositions may each be identified as being internally coherent, and obviously it would be difficult to know in such a situation which system should be taken to be true. In this situation it may be argued that the coherence theory cannot help us, and consequently that we will have to resort to some other criterion in order to resolve the difficult. In such circumstances Rescher's view of coherent systems being hypotheses affording authority for making rational truth-claims appears reasonable.

The dilemma which causes Rescher to adopt this position is recognised by Clark as not only being logically possible, but even to be expected for it would take an omniscient mind to fathom the implications of the various systems which are open to man, and hence the coherence of some of them may be quite beyond the understanding of man, despite his most strenuous and perceptive attempts (28). Such a situation may furthermore leave us with two or more systems which are incompatible though independently coherent (29). Undoubtedly we are face with hypotheses but they are hypotheses which Clark would have us examine because whether we would wish it so or not we are faced with a necessity to make a choice in that our lives are ordered by such systems of propositions. One move which can be made at this point is to specify as many consequences as possible for each system and then to apply the consistency criterion in order that any inconsistency might be made clear. If this process fails to indicate any inconsistency in one of the systems, there is one further move to make. 'It is time to give a reason for or explanation of the hypothesis. This is done by assuming a superior hypothesis from which the previous one is an implication. This process is repeated until one arrives at a superior principle that is sufficient' (30). The sufficient principle in this case is that of logical consistency allied to the ability of the system to offer answers to practical problems (31). 'But if one system can provide plausible solutions to many problems whilst another leaves too many questions unanswered, if one system ends less to scepticism and gives more meaning to life, if one worldview is

consistent while others are self-contradictory, who can deny us, since we must choose, the right to choose the most promising first principle' (32).

At first sight it might be thought disappointing to find a philosopher who places such emphasis on logical though apparently advocating that decision be taken on the basis of empirical adequacy. It is however a position Clark is forced to adopt by his insistence that a choice be made. His argument is that the acceptance of contradictory systems is in itself to make a choice, and that being so it is desirable to make one which though empirically based, is nevertheless in harmony with the criterion of consistency. What appears to be a capitulation to empiricism is rather an acceptance of the principle that the consistency of a philosophical system includes its consequences. In the words of Ronald Nash, 'When we are faced with a choice between two antithetic first principles, we should choose the one which, when applied to the whole of reality, will give us the most coherent picture of the world' (33).

It is a truism of the coherence theory that the truth of a proposition can never be determined by examining the proposition in isolation. Propositions, under this theory, are true by virtue of a relationship which holds with other propositions. It is a contextual matter. Now whilst this characterization is adequate as a general statement, Clark, along with other holders of this general position, has to face the problem of enunciating which other propositions are cohered with (34). Clearly it will not do to infer that the coherence is with all other propositions for it is obviously possible for meaningful propositions to contradict and exhibit incoherence, for example, 'p is black' and 'p is white' are both meaningful propositions but they do not cohere. To ask for coherence with all other propositions is simply to ask for too much and makes a nonsense of the theory.

So too does the contrary position of requiring coherence with some propositions, though in this case by asking too little. Many systems of belief meet such a requirement as may novels and fairy stories. It may be argued that the propositions in question are those which are true, but this is open to two objections. Firstly it is a vacuous requirement in that it is necessarily true by reason of the very concept of a coherence theory, but secondly, the question of which propositions are designated true is still left unanswered unless we have some means other than coherence by which to determine their truth. But in this case, we would then be denying that coherence is able to do the job required of it as a means of discriminating between truth claims. The problem then is to answer the question 'What do true

propositions cohere with?' in such a way that circularity of argument is avoided whilst at the same time providing at least one proposition which is known to be true on grounds other than that of coherence. Yet such grounds must not destroy the coherence theory.

In Alan White's terms, 'Coherence of one empirical judgment with another is accepted as a practical test of truth only because the second judgment is independently accepted as true' (35), though the grounds on which the acceptance is based is the problem philosophers have sought to handle. A.C. Ewing in his earlier work posited coherence with experience as a means of initiating coherence (36), but this would be far too an empiricist position for Gordon Clark to accept, though this in no way implies that he would have to quarrel with the idea that true propositions are necessarily capable of expression in terms of the real world. Indeed we have seen that it is part of his thesis that coherent propositions which are true are not to be viewed as arbitrary devices of man, but have ontological status. They reflect the reality of the world in which they operate because they are primarily laws of being and secondly laws of logic (37). Nevertheless to say that they have some sort of match with the experienced world is not to say that the match has the function of guaranteeing the propositions' truth.

As we have seen, Clark holds a form of probabilistic theory where the probability of the truth of a set of propositions is increased by reason of their mutual relationship (38). In this simple form such a theory is not sufficient for it is clear that no matter how strongly supportive of one another a set of propositions may be, there is simply no way in which a logical move can be made from mutual coherence to truth. For this reason the theory has to be strengthened (39), and Clark seeks to do this by the use of what he calls the axiom of revelation. That is to say, consistency is supplemented by an appeal to the Bible as a means of determining particular truths (40).

The axiom as Clark states it is 'The Bible is the Word of God', a formulation which as he concedes in discussing George Mavrodes attack on the idea, could be more elegantly formulated (41). Assuming that God does not deal in falsities, obviously the notion of God's Word is here used as a means of affirming the truth of the propositions and it is used to assert the source of such truths. Now to make the claim that the Bible is the Word of God invites the question of how the Bible can be so identified. How is the axiom to be justified? The question is not one to which Clark addresses himself directly for he argues that to do so would be to misunderstand the nature of an axiom. An axiom is a first principle

on the basis of which other propositions are advanced, but to submit it to other principles would be to advance it as a theorem rather than a principle (42). There is no logical ground for accepting the axiom, but as already noted, there are on Clark's account, pragmatic grounds that a verbal revelation embodied in the Bible presents a better answer than do other axioms to questions such as 'Does the axiom make knowledge possible?'

In answer to the question 'What do true propositions cohere with?' then, Clark proposes the Bible as the revelation of God. 'Scripture ... is the mind of God. What is said in Scripture is God's thought' (43). There are important consequences of this position for both Clark's epistemology and theology. There is the obvious acceptance of the proposition that God's thought is true and the corollary that the propositions contained in the Bible are true. Further, any valid deductions made from biblical propositions are true. But for modern man there is the further implication that on this account, empirically based propositions which are inexpressible in biblical terms cannot be known to be true. This is of some importance when it is remembered that much of our supposed knowledge is derived from recent empirical work in the sciences which is not to be found recorded in the pages of the Bible, as for example many of our knowledge claims about human physiology. The dilemma is that of establishing a method by which putative truth claims might be evaluated, recognising that our common experiences indicate that there is no certainty in claims based on such sources as our sensory experiences, our memories or historical data. Recognizing the twentieth century emphasis on an appeal to empiricism, Clark is particularly concerned to show the weakness of the empiricist's case (44), and whilst the following words come from the pen of C. I. Lewis, they could well have been written by Gordon Clark. 'Unless there are some empirical truths known otherwise than by their relations of the consistency or inconsistency with others, no empirical truths can ever be determined' (45). Clark would add that such knowledge is unattainable as against Lewis' claim that 'It is absolutely requisite that some at least of the set of statements possess a degree of credibility ... derivable from the relation of them to direct experience' (46).

His strong insistence on the inadequacy of empiricism has led some of Clark's critics to point to a difficulty in holding this axiom of revelation, namely that if sensory experience is unacceptable as a source of knowledge then it follows that we cannot know what the revelation is, for we are dependent upon sense perception for that knowledge (47). Not only does the objection present an apparent

contradiction in Clark's case, but it also has the consequence that the axiom will not do the job that Clark requires of it, and that he does not after all have an answer to the problem of what true propositions cohere with. Indeed by appealing to his own criterion of consistency his position would have to be rejected as being false. The significance of the matter can best be seen in the statement of the difficulty presented by Ronald Nash (48).

'Argument 1. Clark contends:

P1 Any position that leads to sceptism is false.

P2 Empiricism leads to sceptism.

C1 Empiricism is false.

Argument 2. Furthermore, Clark argues:

P3 Man cannot know anything through his senses (from C1)

P4 Human knowledge is limited to the contents of divine revelation.

P5 But man cannot know the content of the Bible save through his senses.

C2 Therefore, man cannot know the truths God has revealed in the Bible.

Argument 3.

P6. The only knowledge available to man is contained in the Bible (from P4).

P7 But, for Clark, man cannot attain this knowledge (from C2).

C3 It follows that Clark's view reduces to scepticism.

C4 It follows further that Clark's view is false (from P1).'

Clark's answer to the charges against him appears to be twofold. Firstly and somewhat negatively, in replying to Mavrodes he appears to gloss over the matter by again asking how the problems of empiricism are to be met (40). Nash comments on such a reply 'But this is not the point at issue. If empiricism leads to sceptism (as Clark contends) then Clark's own view leads to scepticism since the only way one can come in contact with God's revelation in the Scriptures is through sensory experience' (50). But Clark is surely justified in claiming that this is precisely the point at issue, for the difficulty exists only if it is accepted that sensory experience is a source of knowledge (51). In other words the onus is placed on the critic to show that sensory experience is 'the only way one can come in

contact with God's revelation in the Scriptures'. If the critic can do so then Clark has an insurmountable problem, but Clark complains that his critics never give a satisfactory account of perception. It is always assumed rather than shown and his rejection of empiricism is ignored rather than refuted (52). It is understandable if some of the participants in the debate feel frustrated as such a reply, for even if sensory experience is rejected, the question still remains as to how knowledge of God's revelation is to be obtained and Clark's repeated appeal for a theory of sensation and perception which justifies the challenge is annoying for anyone seeking a positive answer from him.

Secondly though, Clark does present a positive account. As in so much of his work he finds Augustine a helpful starting point. Speaking of the current problem he writes, 'As for a book, the words in it, and the question how can we learn from it, the great Augustine explained in *De Magistro* that we never learn anything by sensations we call words' (53) Augustine is quoted with approval 'Has this (biblical) story been transmitted to us otherwise than by means of words? I answer that everything signified by these words are already in our knowledge' (54), so that truth is found in the mind and the learner contemplates the judgment as to its truth (55).

On Clark's account then true propositions cohere with the proposition 'The Bible is the Word of God'. What relationship is there between the axiom and the coherence theory of truth. The theory has already been described in terms of consistency and with reference to the law of contradiction, whilst Scripture has been seen to be, in Clark's words, God's thought. The question then concerns the relationship between the laws of thought and God, particularly as it might be argued by appealing to God's thought, Clark is looking to a principle other than the coherence for a truth criterion. To maintain his coherence theory Clark has to hold a concept of God which not only has room for the use of the law of contradiction, but which in some sense equates with such a law. Not only does Clark claim that the concept must make use of the law of contradiction (56) but he holds the stronger thesis that God and logic (i.e. the law of contradiction) are one and the same principle (57).

As we will see later this has other implications for the concept of God which Clark holds, but for the present it will suffice to show how other possible accounts of the relationship are handled. It is, for example, tempting to argue that as Clark acknowledges that verbal expression, whether by God or man, requires the application of the law of contradiction if the expression is to have meaning, then the law is logically prior to the concept of a God who speaks to man. The point is made by Rousas J. Rushdoony,

'If the law or principle is the basic tool for understanding, then it and not God is basic to thinking, to interpretation' (58). This is to say that logical priority requires that there is an area of human discourse over which God does not have sovereignty Nash notes the same implication in Edgar Brightman's assertion that God is limited in what He might do by the structure of reality. In particular Brightman claims that God cannot do the logically absurd (50).

Clark deals with the specific objection by claiming that the logically absurd is 'nothing', and that to speak of God being unable to do 'nothing' is not an inability. Logical absurdities do not exist in reality (60). The more general problem raised by Rushdoony only has weight if God is in some way apart from the use of the law of contradiction, but Clark argues that 'the law is God thinking' and borrows Aristotle's phrase 'thought-thinking-thought' to make the point The case is emphasised by retranslating the early verses of John's gospel to read 'Logic' for 'Logos', so that it reads, 'In the beginning was Logic and Logic was with God and Logic was God ...' Logic was God (61). It follows that God is not logically or temporally prior to logic (the law of contradiction).

It is now possible to see how Gordon Clark tries to deal with some of the problems attending the acceptance of a coherence theory of truth and it has been pointed out that at some points at least, he does so by use of the concept of God. There is indeed a clear interdependence in his work between his concept of God and his theory of truth, and it now remains to indicate further just what concept is implied by or logically required by this theory.

To postulate the Bible as the axiom of revelation and to make it crucial to his theory of knowledge suggests that Clark's concept of God is derived from the Bible and this is so. In numerous places, he assumes such attributes as the omnisciences, omnipotence and sovereignty of God without developing them, and it would no doubt be correct to assume that they should be given the meaning of traditional theism. It is however the more detailed points at which these attributes reflect the theory of truth just discussed that concern us here.

The provision of some kind of proof of God's existence does not loom very large in Clark's work, though he does give some attention to showing the inadequacy of the traditional proofs because of their dependence upon empiricism (62). There is however a form of argument already described which Clark

sees as a method of reaching a proof and this stems from his belief in the necessity for coherence and consistency in any set of meaningful propositions. The logical necessity for true propositions to exhibit coherence means that various accounts of the world may be examined for internal coherence and where incoherence exists then it may be taken that those propositions are false. In this way it should be possible to establish the truth or falsity of the proposition 'God exists.' This is of course a methodological point deriving from an epistemological position, though it is difficult to see how it would be possible to ever reach a conclusion concerning God's existence by it without having omniscience – in which case the method would no doubt be superfluous! However Clark does provide guidelines to enable us to assess the strength of competing explanations of the world and on his account there can be no doubt that the most consistent explanation is to be found in an account of Christianity which postulates the existence of God (63). It is a method which allows no easy quick answers to be given, nevertheless God's existence should be provable in principle given the validity of the theory of proof.

More specific as a proof is Clark's argument from the nature of truth (64). Starting from his repudiation of scepticism, he argues that truth is unchangeable, immutable. But further, truth is also mental or spiritual, and this is argued for by a rejection of the theses that truth, propositions, thought are a form of physical motion. The denial rests on the impossibility of memory on a physical account, for if a motion is physical then when the second motion occurs the first has gone and it is impossible to intelligently say that the two are the same. How are they to be identified if one has gone? 'It is a peculiarity of mind and not body that the past can be made present' (65). Communicable truth also requires that an immaterial idea may be present in two minds at once. On such lines Clark supports his contention that truth is mental.

The next step in the argument is to point out the independence of truth. Following Augustine, Clark holds that truths are discovered in the mind and as they are contemplated, so they are used to judge the truth or falsity of what is taught by others. Yet truth is not a product of the individual mind but is universal. Truth existed before any individual was born, rather truth has always existed and this is to say that it is superior to human minds. But it is still mental and this leads to the conclusion that there is a mind which is infinitely superior to that of any individual in which truth resides. This superior Mind is what Clark calls God.

Whatever other limitations the line of thought may have, as presented the argument does not logically entitle Clark to use the name 'God' to describe the conclusion (66). At best all that has been shown is the necessity for a mind superior to that of man. Nevertheless by calling on another of Clark's arguments it may be possible to make the further more that will enable us to identify that mind with God.

As we noticed earlier, propositions which are known as opposed to those which are believed are rightly to be seen as God's thoughts, which leads to the corollary that as truths are God's thoughts, then God must have the characteristics identified with truth. That is to say that God is an 'immutable Mind, a supreme Reason, a personal living God' (67) being spiritual in nature. To identify God is to identify truth for there is a sense in which to know anything is to know God.

The argument is at heart an attempt to provide an intelligent and meaningful explanation of the nature of truth and although reference has to be made to the axiom of revelation in order to complete the case, it nevertheless stands with the implied challenge of all Gordon Clark's arguments that would-be detractors present a more coherent case. Theism, it is claimed, presents a coherent explanation of truth.

It has been noted that an insistence on a coherent theory of truth in a form dependent upon the law of contradiction implies a rejection of empiricism which it is argued leads to scepticism. But this raises the question of how man's knowledge is to be gained, and on this Clark appeals to a form of apriorism. His position is expounded in relation to Kant (68) and agrees with that of Kant in making human knowledge dependent upon innate ideas possessed by man as the prerequisites of learning. Nevertheless his is not a complete acceptance of Kant's ideas for he claims that as presented they have weaknesses. For example, he rejects Kant's claim that all our knowledge begins with experience (69), he also believes that Kant postulate categories which cannot be justified and perhaps most importantly that he does not give a satisfactory account of why all men have the same categories (70). Clark's positive account takes a preformation theory which Kant mentions and, in Clark's view wrongly, rejects (71).

The theory is simply that man is able to know because God has not only created man but done so in

such a way that he has dispositions to think in certain ways. One of Kant's objections to such a view was that it removes from categories that necessity which is essential to them. Kant argues that synthetic a priori statements can no longer be made under a preformation theory, the most that can be said is that 'I am so constituted that I cannot think these representations in any other way' (72). This is to say that there is a necessity, but it rests in the way in which matters are seen rather than in their nature. It is an arbitrary subjective necessity.

Clark meets the objection in two ways. Firstly, he argues that Kant introduces unessential elements into his criticism by denying apriorism for if God has created man in the way describe, then surely these dispositions are innate. How else can they be described? (73) But secondly, Clark appeals to his concept of God to meet Kant's argument, for God is seen as being the creator of the world who has ordered the world and the mind in such a way that they harmonize, so that human dispositions to think in certain ways are not simply subjective attitudes but harmonize with the world and reflect the way the world is (74). To see the truth of the proposition 'an object cannot be red and green all over at the same time' is not simply the result of a particular limitation of thought, but is a statement about the nature of the world. It is the same creator God who has created both the mind and the world and Clark argues that this maintains the existence of synthetic a priori propositions. Categories are still identified as being innate.

Clark illustrates the point by referring to the law of contradiction being applicable to things as well as to thought, so that even a thing-in-itself cannot also be a not-thing-in-itself. He argues that his epistemology allows for a consistent account of the way in which man comes to know.

It is a further question though as to what is knowable and it has already been indicated that they key concept in Clark's reply is the axiom of revelation. Not only does this set the limits of historical and scientific propositions known to be true, but it also determines what might be known about God. The adequacy of this single axiom to do the job it purports to do is questioned by George Mavrodes in his extremely able challenge (75). Mavrodes argues that to go from

P1 The Bible is the Word of God, to

C Therefore, everything in the Bible is true

requires the further premises that

P2 Everything God says is true.

His argument is indisputable. The significance of this for Mavrodes is that the axiom of revelation (P1) is inadequate in that the conclusion cannot be derived from the axiom alone (76). Mavrodes is surely correct in pointing out that the axiom as stated is too brief but it is surprising that he goes on to suggest that more than one axiom is required. The point is that Mavrodes is presupposing an attribute of God which Clark would accept as being correctly attributed, but which nevertheless is a presupposition. It is clear that claims concerning the veracity of God are no more established by being presupposed than are other presuppositions. On Clark's account the presupposition is only established because it is entailed by P1. It would be in line with his general position to enquire how the proposition 'Everything God says is true' is known to be true unless by P1 'The Bible is the Word of God'.

Clark himself advances the same counter but in another form, namely that if the word 'God' is to be given biblical meaning, 'then it is analytically certain that everything God says is true' (77). The counter removes the need for P2 as it then becomes part of P1. God then, is the God of the Bible.

Although God is described in his own revelation, there is a suspicion that Gordon Clark has a concept of God apart from that revelation. In the second Wheaton Lecture he argues that, 'To try to extort knowledge from an unwilling God is impossible if God is the supreme omnipotent Being. Therefore if we profess a god who is infinitely superior to man, we should not be surprised by the necessity of a revelation, if we are to know him' (78). The conclusion drawn is that 'either revelation must be accepted as an axiom or there is no knowledge of God at all', but the argument offered only supports this if it is assumed that God is the supreme omnipotent Being. Either the Bible, as the axiom, gives us the knowledge of God's omnipotence, or His omnipotence entails the necessity for the axiom as a revelation. Yet Clark seems to offer both propositions in a circular argument. It is obvious from his response to Mavrodes that omnipotence is an attribute established analytically by the axiom of revelation and this would seem to be his position, yet his use of the attribute to establish the axiom certainly hints at an Anselmic type of analysis independent to and logically prior to the axiom. He

certainly holds that God is omnipotent and may claim consistency in that it is a biblical concept. Whether he would hold that 'God is omnipotent' is a tautology is uncertain, though unlikely.

It was earlier pointed out that Gordon Clark identifies logic as 'God thinking' and it was shown how he supports his coherence theory by this identification. It follows that as logic is an expression of God's nature, then God is a rational being, and furthermore if the law of contradiction is a necessary aspect of his nature then His work in creation and the exercise of His omnipotence will also be rational. The assertion of God's rationality means for Clark that all God's knowledge is related in some way. Indeed this has to be, given his identification of coherence with God.

This theory of truth has the further implication that God is omniscient. If Clark is correct in his assertion that all propositions cohere and that they form a single system, then the only way they can be known to be true is if there is a mind able to take in the sum total of propositions and able to grasp the relationship between them. A similar conclusion has already been noted in the way in which Clark's view of the nature of truth leads to the existence of a superior mind.

Ronald Nash pointed out what he takes to be a contradiction in this conclusion, namely that 'Clark has told us that knowledge always has as its object propositions. The means that all that God knows are propositions'. That is, that only propositions are truth candidates. He continues, 'But surely I, the writer of this sentence, am not a proposition nor are you, the reader. If God knows only propositions, Clark seems to imply that God cannot know you and me as existing individuals. And this is a denial of God's omniscience' (79). Clark's response is twofold. Negatively, he repeats his earlier assertion that although common sense would seem to indicate that individuals may be known, his analysis still holds good that only propositions are true and knowable. Nash appears to be asking for non-propositional truth and hence the onus is placed on him to show its possibility. More positively, he quotes Leibniz to the effect that 'the ego is a complex definition, including the life history of the person, and no doubt his state in a future world as well. This definition is not unknowable in essence and God knows it because he determined what it should be' (80). In other words, an individual is a space-time being knowledge of whom is propositional.

Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the position that has been described, it has not been the

purpose of this study to evaluate them. Rather it has been the intention to explore the way in which a particular though in many respects orthodox version of the coherence theory may be complemented by a particular concept of God. In this version, the problem attendant on such a theory are met by postulating the God of traditional theism, the theory of truth depending on the existence of such a God for its plausibility. But further, the theory of truth in turn implies a God who possesses certain attributes. It would be wrong to conclude that the argument is circular, for those attributes are the outcome of aspects of the theory which do not in themselves requires the assumption of a deity for their strength. Rather, those attributes are in harmony with and confirm the concept of God which is advanced as the answer to the epistemological problems.

In Gordon Clark we have an instance of a philosopher for whom a particular theory of truth requires a particular concept of God.

NOTES

1. Clark, G.H. Three Types of Religious Philosophy, 1973, ch. 5.
2. Clark, G.H. 'Reply to Roger Nicole' in Nash, R.H. (ed.), The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark, 1968, p. 478.
3. Rescher, N. The Coherence Theory of Truth, 1973, p. 24.
4. Clark, G.H. 'The Bible as True', Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 114, p. 168.
5. Neurath, O. Foundation of the Social Sciences, 1952, p. 13.
6. Clark, G.H. op. Cit., pp. 158, 168.
7. Clark, G.H. 'Reply to Ronald H. Nash' in Nash, R.H. (ed.) The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark, 1968, p. 413.
8. Clark, G.H. A Christian View of Men and Things, 1952, p. 24.
9. For example, as presented by White, A.R. Truth, 1971, p. 110.
10. Ewing, A.C. Idealism: A Critical Survey, 1934, p. 237.
11. Rescher, N. op. Cit., p. 46f.
12. Ibid., pp. 30, 31
13. Ibid., p. 4.

14. Ibid., p. 47.
15. Clark, G.H. A Christian View of Men and Things, 1952, p. 30.
16. Ibid., p. 31
17. Rescher, N. op. Cit., p. 31
18. The difficulty can be seen in the proposition 'It is raining' which may be true at a given time and place. The certainty can however be seen when restated, 'It is raining here on the 10th. January 1989'. If true at all, then it does not cease to be true next week or next century. Truth is unchanging. Clark asserts the same immutable characteristic against pragmatism and instrumentalism. A Christian View of Men and Things, 1952, p. 319.
19. Ibid., P. 31.
20. Ibid., p. 319.
21. See for example, the discussion of recent views in O'Conner, D.J. The Correspondence Theory of Truth, 1975.
22. This line of thought is indicated by Ronald H. Nash in 'Gordon Clark's Theory of Knowledge' in idem., The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark, 1968, p. 139.
23. Clark, G.H. Religion, Reason, and Revelation, 1961. p. 149.
24. Clark, G.H. Thales to Dewey, 1957. p. 103.
25. Ibid., p. 98.
26. Ibid., p. 97.
27. Nash, R.H. 'Gordon Clark's Theory of Knowledge' in idem., The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark, 1968, p. 127, commenting on Clark's view of the axiomatic nature of the law of contradiction expounded in A Christian View of Men and Things, 1952, p. 29.
28. Frederick Copleston presents the problem, 'Coherence refers in the long run to one all-inclusive significant whole in which form and matter, knowledge and its object, are inseparately united. In other words, truth as coherence means absolute experience. And an adequate theory of truth as coherence would have to provide an intelligible account of absolute experience, the all-inclusive totality, and to show how the various levels of incomplete experience form constitutive moments in it. But it is impossible in principle that these demands should be met by any philosophical theory. For such theory is the result of finite and partial experience and can be at best only a partial manifestation of the truth'. A History of Philosophy, Vol. 8, Part 1, 1966, pp. 264-5.
29. Clark, G.H. A Christian View of Men and Things, 1952, p. 32

30. Clark, G.H. Thales to Dewey, 1957, p. 83.
31. A similar view is advanced by Sellars, W. *Science, Perception, and Reality*, 1963, pp. 321-358, and by Harman, G. 'Induction' in Swain, M. (ed.), *Induction, Acceptance and Rational Belief*, 1970, pp. 83-99, but is discussed and ejected by Keith Lehrer, *Knowledge*, 1974, pp. 159-182, on the grounds that whilst we might be justified in holding a belief as a result of explanatory coherence, this does not enable us to assert the truth of the explanation. However whilst Lehrer explores explanation as a characterization of coherence, Clark's use refers to a procedure for resolving the problem of choosing between two plausible systems of beliefs.
32. Clark, G.H. *A Christian View of Men and Things*, 1952, p. 34.
33. Nash, R.H. *op. Cit*, p. 155.
34. It was because of this difficulty that M. Schlick rejected the theory, 'Since no one dreams of holding the statements of a story book true and those of a text of physics false, the coherence view fails utterly. Something more, that is, must be added to coherence'. 'The Foundation of Knowledge' in Ayer, A.J. (ed.), *Logical Positivism*, 1966.
35. White, A.R. *Truth*, 1971, p. 116.
36. Ewing, A.C. *Non-Linguistic Philosophy*, 1968, pp. 203-4.
Compare with his later view expressed in *Value and Reality*, 1973, ch. 3 where he rejects the coherence theory as a means of providing an ultimate criterion of truth.
37. Clark, G.H *Thales to Dewey*, 1957, p. 98.
38. Versions of such a theory are described in Chisholm, R. *Theory of Knowledge*, 1966, p. 53, and in Lewis, C.I. *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, 1971, pp. 338-9.
39. Rescher, N. *op. Cit.*, p. 53ff. Seeks to strengthen the theory by postulating 'data', i.e. truth-candidates, which are used both to delimit the propositions under consideration at any given time, and also to act as the 'outside' point to which potential candidates for a truth claim are referred.
40. Clark, G.H. 'Reply to Gilbert B. Weaver' in Nash, R.H. (ed.), *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, 1968, p. 463.
41. Clark, G.H. 'Reply to George I. Mavrodes' in Nash, R.H. (ed.), *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, 1968, p. 442. For a detailed criticism of Clark's axiomatization, see Mavrodes' original paper in the same collection, 'Revelation and Epistemology', though it has to be said that surprisingly he repeats objections which Clark seeks to meet in his exposition of the position in the second 'Wheaton Lecture', also published in the same collection.

42. Clark, G.H. 'Wheaton Lecture II' in Nash, R.H. (ed.), *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, 1968, p. 59.
43. Ibid., p. 69.
44. Clark, G.H. 'Wheaton Lecture I' in Nash, R.H. (ed.), *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, 1968, *A Christian View of Men and Things*, 1952, pp. 302-312. *Thales to Dewey*, 1957, pp. 278-284, 357-394.
45. Lewis, C.I. *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, 1971, p. 341.
46. Ibid., p. 339.
47. The argument is raised by Ronald H. Nash, op. Cit., and by George I. Mavrodes, op. Cit. Clark himself acknowledge the difficulty in his 'Wheaton Lectures II', in Nash, R.H. (ed.), *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, 1968, p. 90.
48. Nash, R.H. op. Cit., p. 174f.
49. Clark, G.H. 'Reply to George I. Mavrodes' in Nash, R.H. (ed.), *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, 1968, p. 446.
50. Nash, R.H. op. Cit., p. 174.
51. Clark, G.H. 'Reply to Ronald H. Nash' in Nash, R.H. (ed.), *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, 1968, p. 415.
52. In private correspondence with Clark dated 15th January 1977, he writes, 'At this point my friends and kindly enemies complain that I cannot read and learn from the Bible itself, and that the patient woman who lives with me is my wife. However, they never help me to make sure. Their complaint is beside the point. It is their obligation to provide a theory of sensation and perception that justifies the assertion of a book or a wife. They regularly evade the obligation'.
53. Ibid.
54. Augustine *De Magistro*, XI, 37, quote in Clark's 'Reply to Ronald H. Nash' in Nash, R.H. (ed.), *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, 1968, p. 416.
55. Clark, G.H. *A Christian View of Men and Things*, 1952, p. 321.
56. 'It is impossible that 'being a man' should mean precisely 'not being a man', or that perception should be nonperception, or that a wind should be both y and not-y. And this is in reality a justification of the law of non-contradiction'. *Thales to Dewey*, 1957, p. 100.
57. Clark, G.H. 'Wheaton Lecture II' in Nash, R.H. (ed.), *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, 1968, p. 68.

58. Rushdoony, R.J. By What Standard, 1971, p. 22f.
59. Nash, R.H. op. Cit., p. 134, referring to Brightman, E.S. The Philosophy of Religion, 1940, pp. 285, 303.
60. Ibid.
61. Clark's position is expounded in his second Wheaton Lecture in Nash, R.H. (ed.), The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark, 1968, pp. 65-68.
62. Clark, G.H. A Christian View of Men and Things, 1952, pp. 28-9, 312.
63. Ibid., p. 26ff.
64. Ibid., p. 318ff. For a similar account see Young, W., Foundation of Theory, 1967, p. 106. The entire argument is based on that of Augustin in The True Religion quoted in Mourant, John A. Introduction to the Philosophy of St. Augustin, 1964, pp. 68-76.
65. Ibid., p. 320ff.
66. That this is the crucial stage in the argument is confirmed by Etienne Gilson in The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine, 1961, p. 18, though he does not go on to mention the logical problem.
67. Clark, G.H. A Christian View of Men and Things, 1952, p. 321.
68. For a detailed discussion see Thales to Dewey, 1957, p. 410f. And A Christian View of Men and Things, 1952, p. 312ff.
69. Kant, I. Critique of Pure Reason, (trans. N. Kemp Smith) 2nd. Imp. 1933, B1 41.
70. Clark, G.H. A Christian View of Men and Things, 1952, p. 316.
71. Kant, I. op.cit., B167, pp. 174-5.
72. Ibid., B167, p. 175.
73. Clark, G.H. A Christian View of Men and Things, 1952, p. 315.
74. Ibid., p. 316.f
75. Mavrodes, G.I. op.cit.
76. Ibid., p. 230.
77. Clark, G.H. 'Reply to George I. Mavrodes' in Nash, R.H. (ed.), The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark, 1968, p. 442.
78. 42. Clark, G.H. 'Wheaton Lecture II' in Nash, R.H. (ed.), The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark, 1968, p. 60.
79. Clark, G.H. 'Reply to Ronald H. Nash' in Nash, R.H. (ed.)
The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark, 1968, p. 413.

80. Ibid., p. 412.