

Tactical Question for the Group Re Terminology In Discussing Reason and Logic

Post by "Cassius" of January 20, 2021 at 6:27 PM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

Yes, a first principle is an axiom. It's something you start with that you can't prove, nor is it logic based. An assumption that other parts of your model use but can't prove. It's not the same as a fact, because by its nature it actually can't be shown to be accurate. If it ever IS shown to be accurate by some kind of evidence, then it is no longer a first principle.

If your first principles are wrong, then anything derived from them is wrong.

However, a first principle that there exists an observable reality can't lead to other reliable conclusions without evidence... because choosing that as a first principle means observations are required for other conclusions.

When I made my posts above I had not really focused on this one from Elayne. I do not read DeWitt as following this "unprovable" perspective on "First Principles." I think both DeWitt and Epicurus were explicitly considering their principles to be proven by observation, from which point they THEN were treated as the confirmed foundation on which the rest were based.

This may be another situation where a word ("first principle" or even "axiom") is being used more loosely than it might be in formal logic, but it does seem to me that the "proven" version of a first principle is the way that DeWitt and Epicurus were looking at things, and that's the way that makes the most sense to me too. To say that your first principle is unprovable (let's assume an imaginary line with only length but no width) immediately rules it out of my mind as a candidate for being a first principle.