

Propositional Logic, Truth Tables, and Epicurus' Objection to "Dialectic"

Post by "Cassius" of September 5, 2021 at 10:52 AM

Martin has pointed out what appears to be an excellent opportunity to put together a special presentation on Epicurean views of "formal logic" and its relationship to reality. The opportunity comes from our mention [in an earlier thread](#) of the following statement by Torquatus in Cicero's On Ends:

sensibus confirmat, id est incorruptis atque integris testibus, si infantes pueri, mutae etiam bestiae paene loquuntur, magistra ac duce natura, nihil esse prosperum nisi voluptatem, nihil asperum nisi dolorem, de quibus neque depravate iudicant neque corrupte, nonne ei maximam gratiam habere debemus qui hac exaudita quasi voce naturae sic eam firme graviterque comprehenderit ut omnes bene sanos in viam placatae, tranquillae, quietae, beatae vitae deduceret? Qui quod tibi parum videtur eruditus, ea causa est quod nullam eruditionem esse duxit nisi quae beatae vitae disciplinam iuaret. An ille tempus aut in poetis evolvendis, ut ego et Triarius te hortatore facimus, consumeret, in quibus nulla solida utilitas omnisque puerilis est delictatio, aut se, ut Plato, in musicis, geometria, numeris, astris contereret, quae et a falsis initiis profecta vera esse non possunt et si essent vera nihil afferrent quo iucundius, id est quo melius viveremus; — eas ergo artes persequeretur, vivendi artem tantam tamque operosam et perinde fructuosam relinqueret? Non ergo Epicurus ineruditus, sed ii indocti qui quae pueros non didicisse turpe est ea putant usque ad senectutem esse discenda." Quae cum dixisset, "Explicavi," inquit, "sententiam meam et eo quidem consilio, tuum iudicium ut cognoscerem, quae mihi facultas, ut id meo arbitrato facerem, ante hoc tempus numquam est data."

whole discourse relies throughout for confirmation on the unbiased and unimpeachable evidence of the senses; if lisping infants, nay even dumb animals, prompted by Nature's teaching, almost find voice to proclaim that there is no welfare but pleasure, no hardship but pain—and their judgment in these matters is neither sophisticated nor biased—ought we not to feel the greatest gratitude to him who listened to this utterance of Nature's voice, and grasped its import so firmly and so fully that he has guided all sane-minded men into the paths of peace and happiness, calmness and repose? You are pleased to think him uneducated. The reason is that he refused to consider any education worth the name that did not help to school us in happiness.

72 Was he to spend his time, as you encourage Triarius and me to do, in perusing poets, who give us nothing solid and useful, but merely childish amusement? Was he to occupy himself like Plato with music and geometry, arithmetic and astronomy, which starting from false premises cannot be true, and which moreover if they were true would contribute nothing to make our lives pleasanter and therefore better? Was he, I say, to study arts like these, and neglect the master art, so difficult and correspondingly so fruitful, the art of living? No! Epicurus was not uneducated: the real philistines are those who ask us to go on studying till old age the subjects that we ought to be ashamed not to have learnt in boyhood." Thus concluding, he added: "I have explained my own view, but solely with the object of learning what your verdict is. I have never hitherto had a satisfactory opportunity of hearing it."

Again, the thread reference was here, and below is a copy of Martin's post: [RE: Issues In The Meaning And Definition of Logic](#)



One way of stating the issue is that the laws of formal logic in fact do allow a syllogistic construction in which the conclusion is true while one or more premises or false. This is not the way non-experts think that logic works, so it is important that non-experts understand what the experts are asserting, so that they can see that the assertions of formal logic need not be connected with reality -- and for that reason normal people should not infer that formal logic can be used to "disprove reality."

We're going to see if we can put together some reference material that will make this issue easier to understand, and hopefully trace it all the way back to Aristotle if not earlier.

The issue of logic being a tool that can be consistent within itself, and yet not be connected with practical reality, is something that we see come up over and over. It seems to me that this is counterintuitive to the way most non-experts approach the issue of logic, so it will be great to see if we can develop a presentation that will make the issue easier for the average person to understand.