

Thomas Jefferson's Religious Beliefs

Post by "Cassius" of February 2, 2022 at 12:26 PM

[Quote from Matt](#)

however my personal revulsion is not based necessarily on the fact that my own society considers these acts as unlawful nor because of an ad populum argument that because the majority of the world rejects them as wrong or unlawful, I do as well...my own internal instinct tell me it's "wrong" based on my natural experiences and empathetic reaction.

This point made by Matt here strikes me as essentially the exact same argument made by, and extended in great detail, in Jackson Barwis' "[Dialogues Concerning Innate Principles](#)" (his response to John Locke on the blank slate theory). I continue to recommend that to anyone interested in developing the argument. Here he makes Matt's point in other words:

Quote

The innate principles of the soul, continued he, cannot, any more than those of the body, be propositions. They must be in us antecedently to all our reasonings about them, or they could never be in us at all: for we cannot, by reasoning, create any thing, the principles of which did not exist antecedently. We can, indeed, describe our innate sentiments and perceptions to each other; we can reason, and we can make propositions about them; but our reasonings neither are, nor can create in us, moral principles. They exist prior to, and independently of, all reasoning, and all propositions about them.

When we are told that benevolence is pleasing; that malevolence is painful; we are not convinced of these truths by reasoning, nor by forming them into propositions: but by an appeal to the innate internal affections of our souls: and if on such an appeal, we could not feel within the sentiment of benevolence, and the peculiar pleasure attending it; and that of malevolence and its concomitant pain, not all the reasoning in the world could ever make us sensible of them, or enable us to understand their nature.

Possibly that's one of my favorite quotes of all time, because it not only hits against Aristotle's blank slate, but it also in my view hits on the heart Epicurus' argument against improper logical reasoning:

"we are not convinced of these truths by reasoning, nor by forming them into propositions:"

Aristotle regards empiricism as inadequate because he believes that observation can never give necessary connections between objects. In the absence of causal knowledge the empirical scientist must base his knowledge on a study of signs, and inferences from signs are not reliable except in cases where the inferences may be converted into valid syllogisms. He says in one place that a science of physiognomy would be possible only if an invariable correlation could be established between physical qualities and mental traits, for instance

I am thinking that this issue can be summarized as:

"We are not convinced of truth by forming it into logical propositions."

And that applies with special force in issues of ethics and morality.