

Is pleasure as the natural goal of life falsifiable?

Post by "Cassius" of December 8, 2022 at 6:38 AM

Good to hear from you waterholic and this is a very interesting question that it would be good to see if others have suggestions. But first, it seems to me that if you are looking for an abstract syllogistic / logical proof that pleasure is the goal of life, Torquatus would tell you that while some Epicureans (including Torquatus himself) might accept that as a proper approach, that Epicurus himself did not:

Quote

Epicurus places this standard in pleasure, which he lays down to be the supreme good, while pain is the supreme evil; and he founds his proof of this on the following considerations.

[30] Every creature, as soon as it is born, seeks after pleasure and delights therein as in its supreme good, while it recoils from pain as its supreme evil, and banishes that, so far as it can, from its own presence, and this it does while still uncorrupted, and while nature herself prompts unbiased and unaffected decisions. So he says we need no reasoning or debate to shew why pleasure is matter for desire, pain for aversion. These facts he thinks are simply perceived, just as the fact that fire is hot, snow is white, and honey sweet, no one of which facts are we bound to support by elaborate arguments; it is enough merely to draw attention to the fact; and there is a difference between proof and formal argument on the one hand and a slight hint and direction of the attention on the other; the one process reveals to us mysteries and things under a veil, so to speak; the other enables us to pronounce upon patent and evident facts. Moreover, seeing that if you deprive a man of his senses there is nothing left to him, it is inevitable that nature herself should be the arbiter of what is in accord with or opposed to nature. Now what facts does she grasp or with what facts is her decision to seek or avoid any particular thing concerned, unless the facts of pleasure and pain?

[31] There are however some of our own school, who want to state these principles with greater refinement, and who say that it is not enough to leave the question of good or evil to the decision of sense, but that thought and reasoning also enable us to understand both that pleasure in itself is matter for desire and that pain is in itself matter for aversion. So they say that there lies in our minds a kind of natural and inbred conception leading us to feel that the one thing is ~~bet~~ for us to seek, the other to reject. Others again, with whom I agree, finding that many arguments are alleged by philosophers to prove that pleasure is not to be reckoned among things good nor pain among things evil, judge that we ought not to be too confident about our case, and

think that we should lead proof and argue carefully and carry on the debate about pleasure and pain by using the most elaborate reasonings.

My view would be that Epicurus rather than Torquatus was right, and that we need to keep in mind strict limitations on what we can hope to accomplish by abstract logic. Any proofs that we are going to find convincing are going to be direct appeals to evidence that we ourselves can feel (rather than identify abstractly apart from feeling).