

Is pleasure as the natural goal of life falsifiable?

Post by “Joshua” of December 8, 2022 at 7:18 AM

Edit--ok, clearly Cassius and I are of one mind! 😊

My answer is a hard no.

There is no possible claim about what constitutes the proper end of life that meets a test of falsifiability, in part because of an observation made by David Hume.

Quote

The is-ought problem...is the thesis that, if a reasoner only has access to non-moral and non-evaluative factual premises, the reasoner cannot logically infer the truth of moral statements.

Applying this to the pleasure principle, I might think I'm on solid ground by starting things out this way:

"Every living thing, as soon as it is born, seeks after pleasure and recoils from pain." Starting with that, what would it take for us to get to this? "We ought to live our own lives like this, pursuing pleasure as the goal of our lives and avoiding pain as much as we can."

What we're missing is at least one extra premise; something to go between those two statements to connect them in some logical way. But this doesn't give us an objective truth about the proper end of life--it just gives us another argument from logic. What Epicurus actually does with regard to the two statements above (adapted from the Torquatus material) is to offer a non-logical approach.

Epicurus sets out to show this as follows: Every living thing, as soon as it is born, seeks after pleasure, and delights in it as its chief good. It also recoils from pain as its chief evil, and avoids pain so far as is possible. Nature's own unbiased and honest judgment leads every living thing to do this from birth, and it continues to do this as long as it remains uncorrupted. Epicurus refuses to admit any need for discussion to prove that pleasure is to be desired and pain is to be avoided, because these facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, in the same way that fire is hot, snow is white, and honey is sweet. None of these things need be proved by elaborate argument — it is enough merely to draw attention to them. For there is a difference, he holds, between a formal logical proof of a thing, and a mere notice or reminder. Logical proofs are the method for discovering abstract and difficult truths, but on the other hand a mere notice is all that is required for indicating facts that are obvious and evident.