

Episode 203 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 11 - Do The Senses Have Jurisdiction To Pronounce On The Supreme Good?

Post by "Joshua" of November 27, 2023 at 2:42 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And joining the issue of Hume's "is - ought" question to this distinction, it seems to be that we have Epicurus saying that Nature has given us one faculty (feeling / pathe) by which to determine what to choose and what to avoid, and there is no question but that what "is" given (feeling /pathe) clearly "ought" to be followed.

And the question is not "whether" to follow it, but "how" to follow it successfully.

It sounds to me like Epicurus would not be very impressed with Hume's supposed problem, or at the very least he would say it has a very direct answer. The issue is not whether to comply with our natural faculties, but how to assess theories that there are considerations that trump our natural faculties (thereby elevating "Nature" over "logic" and "supernatural religion")

Other views on that?

"we have Epicurus saying that Nature has given us one faculty (feeling / pathe) by which to determine what to choose and what to avoid,"

But this is Epicurus' implicit ought, not a description of how things are.

What Hume is actually asking is how do get from something like this;

"Some things cause pain."

To this;

"We ought to avoid things that cause pain."

Why should we avoid things that cause pain? You might say, because Nature has given us pain a guide. Okay, why should we follow Nature? Because that is the surest road to the life of happiness. Okay, why should we pursue happiness? Because the happy life is the best of all possible lives. Okay, why do we want to live the best life? Because it's the most pleasant life. Why do we want the most pleasant life? Because it's the best life. Why--

--because I said so!

The problem is unsolvable in Hume's terms, not just for Epicurus but for everyone. There's nothing wrong with that--I actually think we're better off without absolute oughts, which is the same thing as saying that we're better off without absolute morality. If God commands you to sacrifice your firstborn, even allowing a God there is no absolute morality to say that you should follow his whims.

This is why *Euthyphro* is my favorite Socratic dialogue. Even assuming the existence of a God, we are still left with only *rational* oughts. If I was Epicurus' lawyer I would tell him to take that deal. Take the deal that leaves you and everyone else, even God himself if he was real, on the same footing. *If* I want to live a blessed life, *then* I should live a life of pleasure, and for all the reasons Epicurus states. But I accept this knowing that it was my choice--and that if even the gods were real, they would choose it for themselves.