

An Exchange On The Use of Logic To Argue The "Absence of Pain" Issue

Post by "Cassius" of March 22, 2019 at 2:30 PM

Poster:

I think that all this confusion about "the highest pleasure being the absence of pain" is based on errors of translation and interpretation.

If we apply the same epistemological method used in modern law and science to ethics - learning how to convert from moral justification (via positiva) to falsification (via negativa) - the conclusion is obvious. It is easy for all of us to agree on what is no good=pain. But as far as what good or pleasure is, or the highest good or pleasure, this is a question of personal preference: anything and everything which is no pain is a good candidate.

I am surprised at how modern Epicurean arguments sound.

Cassius:

Poster, you have some interesting thoughts there that I would be interested to see developed. Can you elaborate on this part? "If we apply the same epistemological method used in modern law and science to ethics - learning how to convert from moral justification (via positiva) to falsification...."

Poster:

In order to adjudicate, juries try to find out not who is telling the truth but who is lying. Similarly, scientific theories or hypotheses cannot be proved but theories can be disproved or falsified. What is good, pleasurable? Anything and everything which is not bad or painful. Therefore, the highest pleasure is this good candidate (preference) in its highest degree, that is, when there is total absence of pain.

Cassius:

Poster: I think your analysis is helpful, Daniel, and needs to be included in the ammunition supply just like the analysis that Epicurus did in responding to Plato. But as a general comment, I think lately in terms of what I see as a trap in debating the issue totally by "logic." Falsifiability can be a good debating tool, but in the end it's just a debate, and we end up asking what it is that really *satisfies* us that one argument is better than the other. We can stack up debating points on our side, and that's what I think Epicurus did with his pleasure pain division, which allows him to prove logically that pleasure has a limit. That was important to refuting Plato's logic.

But in the end it's not "words" that give us confidence. It's our own personal feeling that what is of value to use (what "feels good" to us) is of supreme importance. If we're comfortable with that - if we "trust the senses" - then we don't get sidetracked into these dialectical logic rabbit holes.

Which is pretty much the same kind of reaction that an illiterate island dweller would give to a mathematician who tried to tell him that proving the existence of god through word games should be more important than the island dweller's wife and children and way of life, all of with whom the islander was presumably well pleased. He would stare in disbelief and disgust, and although it's hazardous to overgeneralize, in my view the islander would be right.

That analogy comes to mind due to the recent article below. I think the islander got the best of that argument, over against the abstractions about "jesus" being preached by the oh-so-superior and sophisticated outsider.

