

Cartesian beliefs on sensory perception vs Epicurean knowledge acquired through the senses

Post by “Cassius” of April 29, 2024 at 11:56 AM

Profkesarsarwara - Great to hear from you and that you are studying philosophy so closely! Your father would be proud!

The short answer to your question is that there is a flaw in the premises that the senses are ever deceived. The senses do not form opinions, they simply report information exactly as they perceive it. Opinions are formed in the mind, and it is there that error takes place if we conclude something that is not sufficiently supported by clear and repeated observations of the senses. Erroneous opinions cannot be corrected if the information from new sensations is not accepted with the same confidence as those of prior perceptions, so it is false to deride the senses as unreliable. It is the proper use of the senses that is in question, and so all opinions have to be tested against repeated observations of the senses and nothing accepted as true unless and until the observations begin to line up consistently with one another.

A longer presentation of this can be found in Book 4 of Lucretius where this precise issue of illusions is discussed. (I will come back and post a line reference)

I also highly recommend the entirety of Chapter 8 of DeWitt's "Epicurus and His Philosophy," especially that part from the start of the chapter up to page 142.

Check your messages here and I will respond further, but this should get you or anyone else started on the path that makes the most sense to me in interpreting Epicurus on this issue.