

Considering The Feelings (Pleasure and Pain) and Prolepsis/Anticipations as Sensations

Post by "Cassius" of May 7, 2026 at 6:27 AM

This topic came up in our Zoom of 5/6/26 - whether the feelings and anticipations should be considered to be "sensations" or is that word only strictly applicable to the "five senses." Another way of asking the same question is to consider how parallel or close to each other the three categories really are. Obviously there are differences between them because they have different names, so they are not exactly the same thing. However it seems that they operate in similar ways, and most of us agree that Epicurus held that all of them operate "without opinion" and are "pre-rational." And perhaps most importantly for the question, at times when Epicurus talks about sensation he seems to be including the input we get from pleasure/pain and from prolepsis/anticipation as if they all fit under the same broad category of "sensation" / aesthesis.

Bryan offered the following citations in subsequent conversation and we can use this thread to discuss the issue further:

As to pleasure and pain being sensations:

(Aëtius, Placita Philosophorum, 4.8.2) "Epicurus says: 'a portion [of the functional component of the soul] is sensation, which is a certain faculty - and [a portion is] awareness, which indeed is an activity.' Therefore, with Epicurus, 'sensation' is said in two ways - while it means the faculty, 'sensation' also means the activity."

(PD 24) "If you will absolutely throw out any sensation, and you will not differentiate what is judged among what is still pending versus what is actually present according to sensation, experiences (i.e., pathos = the feelings), and the whole appearance-based attention of mental perception: then you will confuse the remaining sensations with pointless judgment, and thus you will throw out the criteria altogether.

(Lives 10.124c) "Every good and bad is in sensation."

(Plutarch, Against Colotes, 25, 1121A) "[the Epicureans] are shouting and being indignant on behalf of sensation: that they do not say what is external is hot -- but [say] the experience in that [sensation] produced is of that kind [i.e., feeling hot], so then - is not that the same as what is said [by the Cyrenaics] about taste: that it does not say that what is external is sweet - but that some experience (i.e., pathos = a feeling) and movement has been produced for a taste of that kind [i.e., tasting sweet]?"

(Lives, 10.32) "[according to Epicurus] seeing and hearing have been established for us, just like feeling pain... all thoughts have arisen from the sensations."

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