

# Pleasure and Reality

Post by "Cassius" of April 8, 2019 at 7:51 PM

Godfrey:

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

but something that bothers me about anticipations as I've previously understood them is that they seem disturbingly close to Platonic ideals.

Yes depending on the interpretation given to them, "close to Platonic ideals" is pretty much the concern that DeWitt had. I cannot recall if you have read DeWitt's version of them -- whose have you read?

Dewitt goes into significant detail, pointing especially to this Diogenes Laertius comment to indicate that other Epicureans ("the Epicureans generally") deviated from Epicurus himself: "Now in *The Canon* Epicurus affirms that our sensations and preconceptions and our feelings are the standards of truth; the Epicureans generally make perceptions of mental presentations to be also standards. His own statements are also to be found in the *Summary* addressed to Herodotus and in the [Principal Doctrines](#)."

According to DeWitt, "perceptions of mental presentations" must be the result of conscious thought, and that if you form a mental presentation after observation, then what you have is something in your mind that you have created yourself, not an automatic reaction of a faculty given to you by nature.

Of course as usual DeWitt is the minority position - the majority is that you look at enough cows, you form a picture of "cowness" in your mind, and that becomes a standard of truth. DeWitt thinks that is ruled out by the nature of the canon of truth, others say DeWitt is wrong,, and the debate goes on.

There might be a way to reconcile the positions (in my view) by saying that the process of forming pictures is ones mind is so automatic that the pictures themselves become canonical, but DeWitt argues that this blurs the distinction between something that is automatic and something that is the process of conscious reasoning.

With the ultimate hazard, according to DeWitt, being that if you allow that the product of conceptual reasoning can reach canonical status, then your basically a Platonist.

Elli has been very tolerant of me continuing to point out this issue, and that virtually no one in Greece agrees with Dewitt on this 😊 So at this point in the discussion I simply think it is

important to point out what DeWitt saw, because i largely trust his "instincts" in interpreting Epicurus.

Once concern that DeWitt had, and I share, is that later Epicureans were under tremendous pressure from the Stoics to grant to logic/reason a status that Epicurus refused to give it. In addition to the Diogenes Laertius reference above, there is in On Ends this statement, which seems similar as an indication that some later Epicureans bowed to Stoic/Platonic pressure:

"Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature. What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance? Some members of our school however would refine upon this doctrine; these say that it is not enough for the judgment of good and evil to rest with the senses; the facts that pleasure is in and for itself desirable and pain in and for itself to be avoided can also be grasped by the intellect and the reason. Accordingly they declare that the perception that the one is to be sought after and the other avoided is a notion naturally implanted in our minds. Others again, with whom I agree, observing that a great many philosophers do advance a vast array of reasons to prove why pleasure should not be counted as a good nor pain as an evil, consider that we had better not be too confident of our case; in their view it requires elaborate and reasoned argument, and abstruse theoretical discussion of the nature of pleasure and pain."

#### [Quote from Elayne](#)

It doesn't change pleasure being pleasure but it could explain some intuitive aversions.

And that is why (I think) DeWitt calls Epicurus an "intuitist" more than once, rather than a strict "empiricist."

We're basically counting up all the reasons why DeWitt (1) has been excommunicated from polite Academic society, or (2) brilliantly followed clues which open up an accurate understanding of Epicurus for the first time in 2000 years --- depending on your perspective!