

Confusion: "The feelings are only two"

Post by "Cassius" of May 26, 2025 at 2:57 PM

Here is my first effort to synthesize what Bryan and I were discussing last week.

The division of the feelings into two, and not more than two, is based on both feeling and philosophical reasoning:

1. We find through our own pre-rational feeling that all experiences in life naturally fall into positive (pleasure) and negative (pain) categories, and
2. We can and should through reason and logic affirmatively identify the healthy normal functioning of the mind and body (even when they are not being "stimulated") as pleasure.

If we did not hold point (1) to be true, then point (2) would not be justified. Insisting on the truth of point (1) separates Epicurean philosophy, which is based on the evidence of natural sensation (feeling), from Platonism, Stoicism, religion, etc which says reason and logic or divine inspiration alone, without the evidence of sensation, is sufficient.

If we did not hold Item (2) to be true, then we would not recognize as pleasure those experiences in life when we are not being stimulated. We would be like Cicero and Plato and believe that pleasure is not always available, pleasure cannot always serve as the guide of life, and that it is impossible for us to identify a life of happiness as a life of pleasure because pleasure supposedly requires constant stimulation, which is impossible to achieve.

It seems to me that an approach somewhat similar to this is probably where Epicurus was coming from in dividing the feelings into two. Some people will say my point one above is self-evident and all that is needed. I don't think that's the case - I think that the philosophical understanding is also necessary to understand why the division makes sense, and in support of that I would cite the quote from Lucretius:

1:146:

Hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necesses non radii solis neque lucida tela diei discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque.

Bailey:

This terror then, this darkness of the mind, must needs be scattered not by the rays of the sun and the gleaming shafts of day, but by the outer view and the inner law of nature; whose first rule shall take its start for us from this, that nothing is ever begotten of nothing by divine will.