

Confusion: "The feelings are only two"

Post by "Cassius" of May 26, 2025 at 5:43 PM

How's this for a caveat:

As of the afternoon of May 26, 2025, unless and until someone like Don or Bryan or Joshua or otherwise convinces me I am wrong, that's the way it seems to me that the statements of Epicurus as recorded by Torquatus, Diogenes Laertius, the [Principal Doctrines](#), Lucretius, Diogenes of Oinoanda, and Epicurus' own letters best fit together. It takes the study of nature and a scheme of systematic understanding to reach these conclusions and have confidence that they are correct. Neither feeling nor reason alone can do it - you have to combine the two into a rational system where the one supports the other.

To return to Don's point, it is interesting that current researchers tend to reach the same conclusion, but given that they didn't have access to this information I can't see that the ancient Epicureans approached things that way. My first goal is understanding their position before I evaluate whether I think they were on solid ground. So I want to try to put myself in their shoes.

And as for their shoes, it seems to me that they were in the heat of battle with the Platonists and others to develop a philosophy of life that made sense and allowed them to confidently beat back the anti-Pleasure / pro-mysticism assertions of the other schools. Such a philosophy has to be both in touch with practical reality AND logically consistent and persuasive.

Fitting the feeling of pleasure together with sound reasoning in philosophy in this way leads to a logically coherent worldview that accomplishes that goal. It's not magic and it doesn't transform the world into a constant parade of champagne and caviar. But it does allow you to view the universe in a way in which you can live happily and refute the challenges of those who say that you have to rely on supernaturalism.

And thus DeWitt's statement - reason justifies the application of the concepts of pleasure and pain in this way, and humans are happier if they adopt this perspective:

Quote

"The extension of the name of pleasure to this normal state of being was the major innovation of the new hedonism. It was in the negative form, freedom from pain of body and distress of mind, that it drew the most persistent and vigorous condemnation from adversaries. The contention was that the application of the name of pleasure to this state was unjustified on the ground that two different things were thereby being denominated by one name. Cicero made a great to-do over this argument, but it is

really superficial and captious. The fact that the name of pleasure was not customarily applied to the normal or static state did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and believing.

Quote from "Epicurus And His Philosophy" page 240 - Norman DeWitt (emphasis added)