

Confusion: "The feelings are only two"

Post by "Cassius" of May 27, 2025 at 9:56 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

The question, to me, is "Does the idea correlate to reality or not?" Epicurus' categorization, to my current understanding, correlates to reality while Cicero, Plato, "St." Paul, etc. do not.

[Quote from Don](#)

Cicero and Plato redefine pleasure for their own purposes, but Epicurus' all-encompassing concept of pleasure and pain just makes sense to me.

I'm not adding anything new here, but we keep talking about "definitions" and "correlating to reality" for a reason. I always worry about staying away from "reductionism" -- implying that there is no fixed outside reality and everything can be changed simply by assigning different words. It appears Democritus went in that direction, and that leads to skepticism and determinism and all sorts of problems.

Then there's the opposite problem - thinking that there is some absolute eternal reference point either in heaven (Plato) or within everything (Aristotle), and thinking that our task is just to get in touch with this ultimate reality through logic, religion, etc.

What I think Epicurus is doing and we're trying to restate in English is that we should consider as "real" what our feelings tell us as to pleasure and pain. Those feelings come in many varieties, and we can assign many different words and descriptions to them, but we don't change their nature by using different words. We legitimately "feel" certain things to be positive or negative, and we're not just arbitrarily changing the desirable or undesirable nature of the feeling by calling the good bad or the bad good.

I see this as analogous to seeing and hearing and the other core senses. We can assign all sorts of names to describe what we deduce about the inputs of the eyes or ears, but the inputs come to us, like pleasure and pain do, by nature, and without the eyes or the ears etc injecting their own opinions.

My point in writing this being that we're not just totally playing word games by dividing the feelings into two categories. When we observe that it's possible to divide the feelings into different categories, we tend to recoil and think that everything is totally a matter of how we define it, and there's no solid footing on which we can ever stand and have confidence in our conclusions. Epicurus is saying that you have freedom of thought and you can take the position that nothing in life is real or certain if you like, but if you do you will suffer very bad

consequences. It's much better for you to look at nature and realize that no matter whether you like it or not, nature has given you faculties of feeling and sensation that when properly understood and used can lead to lives in which pleasure predominates.