

Can the senses be wrong?

Post by “Cassius” of October 6, 2019 at 4:41 PM

The key part of the DeWitt discussion of this occurs in Chapter 8. Here is an introductory paragraph on the issue Todd and I are citing:

as criteria because they are direct physical contacts between the living being and the external physical reality. They also qualify as criteria because they are irrational, are incapable of memory, and pronounce

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no judgments. Sensation is incapable of memory. It can no more recall a given stimulus than a house can recall the impact of a ball thrown against its wall. The sensation merely registers a stimulus, a melody, for example; it is the memory that says, "I have heard this before"; it is the intelligence that says, "Home Sweet Home."

Unfortunately the discussion of the Sensations has become clouded because of prejudice, negligence, confusions, and ambiguities.

The prejudice consists in classifying Epicurus as an empiricist and the negligence in not putting this assumption to the full test of the evidences and in failing to define the precise meanings of all the terms employed.

The confusions are two in number. The first is between concepts of "truth" and concepts of "value." It is quite possible for a sensation to be true and yet valueless as a criterion. A square tower, for example, appears at a distance to be round; the sensation is true, relative to the distance, but false to the facts. The second confusion is between primary and accessory or derivative notions. This is to say that the ideas represented by the Twelve Elementary Principles of Physics are primary while all other ideas are derivative. The former are *ennoiai*, the latter *epinoiai*.

The chief ambiguities are also two in number. In the dictum of Epicurus that "all sensations are true" both terms are ambiguous. The English word *sensation*, like the Latin *sensus*, is employed to render various words and phrases in Greek, while the word *true*, like its Latin and Greek equivalents, may have any one of three meanings: first, absolutely true, as the statement that two and two make four is true, or second, relatively true, as the distant view of the tower is true, though false in detail, or third, real, in the sense that the sensation corresponds to a real object, such as an ox.