

Passions / Emotions / Feelings - The Second Leg of the Canon of Truth

Post by "Cassius" of January 2, 2017 at 10:55 AM

[Cassius Amicus](#) shared a [link](#).
[December 31, 2016 at 7:58am](#)

I noticed that [Matt Jackson](#) posted on his timeline a quote attributed to Democritus: "Medicine heals diseases of the body, wisdom frees the soul from passions" and that reminds me of several things I'd like to study more:

(1) I see that this quote appears among an interesting collection of quotes from pre-Socratic philosophers here: <http://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3...ek9NP3A&#s=1>

(2) But the real reason I post this is that the use of the English word "passions" here troubles me. Is it an accurate translation? If so, is this statement consistent with Epicurus? What Greek word is being translated as "passions" here and what exactly is the definition? Is the meaning intended to be "excessive" feeling? It seems to me that "passion" in common use is ambiguous, and could be used either to refer either to "all" emotion/feeling/pleasure/pain or only "some" emotions/feelings...." - presumably "excessive" or "out of control"? And what is the relationship of "passion" to pleasure and pain? Is "passion" a global term that includes all pleasure and pain?

The passages I keep going back to for answers on how these terms were used in the Epicurean context are from Diogenes Laertius in his chapter ten:

Yonge has this translation: "Now in the canon, Epicurus says that the criteria of truth are the senses, the preconceptions, and the passions." Also: "They say that there are two passions, pleasure and pain, that affect everything alive."

<https://archive.org.../The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Phi...>

Bailey: "Thus in the Canon Epicurus says that the tests of truth are the sensations and concepts and the feelings." Also:

"The internal sensations they say are two, pleasure and pain, which occur to every living creature...." <https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%...DC4W-wQ&#s=1>

Hicks translates this as "There are two states of feeling, pleasure and pain...." and "Now in The Canon Epicurus affirms that our sensations and preconceptions and our feelings are the standards of truth." <https://en.wikisource.org.../Lives of the Eminent Phi.../Book X>

What is the Greek being translated here? Is Yonge correct that Epicurus was using "passions" as the global term to describe the entire faculty of perceiving pleasure and pain? Bailey's use of the word "concepts" seems dangerous confusing to me, so his choice of "feelings" might be similarly off. Hicks is better with preconceptions but he also uses feelings, and "feelings" might be the least precise word of all.

So in sum I think it's important to be clear what we think is being meant in the Democritus quote. If we consider it to mean that wisdom frees the soul from pleasure and pain, or the entire third leg of the Epicurean Canon, then that would be pure Stoicism and far from Epicurus. What do you think?

Note: Another way of stating the wider question is this: What one single word is best used as the collective term for the third leg of the canon? The first two are pretty easy but what about the third?

- 1) "The five senses" or / "sensations"
- 2) "Anticipations" or "preconceptions"
- 3) "Passions"? "Feelings"? What is the Greek, and the English translation, of the one single word that Epicurus used to refer to the faculty of pleasure and pain?

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Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers, by Kathleen Freeman, [1948], full text etext at [sacred-texts.com](#)

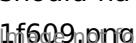
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[Cassius Amicus](#) For my American friends I should have illustrated this post with a hit song from my area of the country: "I **feel** good!  is this what wisdom frees the soul from? <https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%...&h=TAQEkrDuH>

safe_image.php?d=AQCbpf8njf9X25Px&w=158&h=158&url=https%3A%2F%2Fi.ytimg.com%

[James Brown - I Feel Good](#)

LYRICS Wo! I feel good, I knew that I would now I feel good, I knew that I would now...

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[Matt Jackson](#)  found or type unknown

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[Matt Jackson](#) In my opinion, in the 21st century "passion" is not a great word to use as it might have multiple meanings. My interpretation of Democritus is that passion would mean possibly "fantasies" and "anxieties", both are destructive if not remedied, to keep him in line with his Naturalism and atomism.

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[Matt Jackson](#) I would love to know what the original word was.

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[Mish Taylor](#) the word 'perception' for 3/ ?

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[Matt Jackson](#) My general thought is that passion is from the Latin for suffering. As in "Passion of the Christ". So in this case wisdom serves to relieve suffering caused by the ignorance of the Natural world. I'm thinking that the translator used "passion " in this way, especially if he had a strong connection to Christian terminology.

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[Matt Jackson](#) Passion here may refer to "passionem" :...[See More](#)

[Online Etymology Dictionary](#)

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[Cassius Amicus](#) Interesting observation. In that definition passionem is almost entire something negative (suffering). But I don't get the impression that in english it is used that way generally - here the connotation is more "strong feeling of any kind" (at least I think it is.....)

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[Cassius Amicus](#) at least "passionate love" seems to be in common usage, and I don't think the intended implication is "suffering" 1f609.png 😊

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[Matt Jackson](#) I'm just thinking that when this quote was translated, the Biblical term was the one used. Suffering as in the physical and mental suffering of Jesus.

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[Matt Jackson](#) Where are all the Greek speakers?? 1f61c.png

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[Cassius Amicus](#) [Matt Jackson](#) Yes but do we know *when* it was translated? The link on the page in the first post only appears to go back to a book in the in 1940s

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[Matt Jackson](#) I don't. But my guess is it is a late 19th to early 20th century translation. A perfect example is the GRS Mead translation of the Corpus Hermeticum, its full of anachronistic wording to sound high-minded and legitimate . It's also unreadable. Lol

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[Matt Jackson](#) Unreadable in more than one way.

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[Cassius Amicus](#) You guys are exactly on my train of thought but I don't think we can trust any single translation, and as far as I know (and I know nothing) Democritus may have intended something entirely different, and some friendly stoic translator forced the meaning to fit his preconceptions, because of course everyone (every stoic, that is) knows that passion is a bad thing (sarcasm). So with Democritus I don't know if the quote is "correct" (and I am skeptical, if he was indeed the "laughing philosopher"). Nor do I know which of the translations of DL I quoted is correct, if any. I think we have to compare, look for the greek words (and latin if used by a reputable Epicurean like Lucretius) and then do our best to figure out what has the highest probability of being the original meaning. Only THEN can we really start to form our own opinion of whether the writer was "correct"

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[Cassius Amicus](#) At least with Diogenes Laertius we have the greek to work with. Gosh only knows where to find the quote from Democritus in Greek to know which word he used....

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[Noks Huffine](#) The removal of disease results in a healthy body, the removal of negative thoughts and feelings results in a happy mind.

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[Noks Huffine](#) DL 9.9.45 is right on this topic of course "(Democritus believes) the end of action is tranquillity, which is not identical with pleasure, as some by a false interpretation have understood, but a state in which the soul continues calm and strong, undis...[See More](#)

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[Matt Jackson](#) It's the anachronistic English translation that is causing me to have passion. Haha

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[Haris Dimitriadis](#) The word passions needs special care because its meaning has been influenced by the definition of the soul that Plato gave. He imagined the soul as a chariot in which, logic-wisdom was the driver, and the two horses were the feelings and the desires. The feelings were obedient to the driver's instructions, and they contributed to the driver's guides to take under control the second horse, which was expressing the desires=passions of the body. To Plato the material body was the source of unhappiness and this was referred by him as the tomb of the mind. So to Plato passions reflected the desires of the body, which by nature are difficult to get hold on to.

As regards then Democritus saying is risky to interpret it according to the platonian terminology because they had different views. They both lived in the same time period but Democritus was about 30 years older. Plato by his influence managed to distort the initial meaning of the word passion and hence makes difficult for us to know what Deemocritus meant exactly by the saying.

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[Cassius Amicus](#)

Those are exactly the kinds of concerns I had in mind. In order to even begin to dig further we would presumably need the greek version of the fragment, and then compare the word choice to the word choice in Diogenes Laertius, who is himself giving his own summary and apparently not a direct quote.

But rather than the end of the question I still think we are at the beginning. In discussing Epicurus we really need a firm statement of the "name" of the third leg of the canon as Epicurus used the term. Other than the two statements in DL I quoted I am not sure there is a direct statment in the core texts we have of the name of this third leg. I personally refer to it as "the faculty of pleasure and pain" but I am not at all sure that that is the best wording. "pleasure" or "pain" alone do not seem appropriate, and "feelings" and "passions" have all the limitations we are noting. It seems clear that this third leg is also a something we commonly think of as a "sensation" but that too is not a satisfactory word.

As I think of final remarks to close out 2016 I think this issue is one that would really help to make progress on in 2017. Greater clarity on this central point would be critically helpful - and ought to be doable if we are going to represent that we have a good understanding of Epicurean doctrine. ...

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[Haris Dimitriadis](#) The three legs are: The senses, the feelings and the anticipations.

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[Cassius Amicus](#) Also, it seems to have been a critical point of discussion to point out that there are only two of this "faculty" (1 pleasure and 2 pain), as the fact that there are only two seems to be there reason that the absence of one is the measure of the other....[See More](#)

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[Cassius Amicus](#) In our usage today the suggestion that "there are only two feelings, pleasure and pain" would seem very awkward and counterintuitive, so we have work to do in making this topic more understandable.

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[Haris Dimitriadis](#) The way that our mind functions is related to risk. When the mind perceives a risk it creates the emotion of pain, while in normal conditions the emotion of pleasure. The first emotion sets off the defensive or combating mechanism of fight or flight wh...[See More](#)

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[Matt Jackson](#) In my opinion, passion is being used in the Biblical sense. For physical and mental suffering. My sense is that the translator had this meaning in his consciousness. Although this is only my opinion.

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[Haris Dimitriadis](#) Not at all. By passions plato means the desires of the body, which is exactly what religions preach.

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[Matt Jackson](#) Passion is an awful vague term. I'm going to have to save your response to Cassius, with the Greek equivalents for my personal study.

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[Haris Dimitriadis](#) Coming back to Cassius on the meaning of the passions, may I add that Epicurus refrains from using this word, and instead he uses the word "hedone", pleasure, and "epithemia", desire. He also uses the word "aisthanomai", feel. So it is quite natural to interpret pleasure and pain as feelings. It seems that Epicurus meant to avoid the platonian distortion of the word passion, which had an older origin.

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[Cassius Amicus](#) Haris do you remember a reference where "aisthanomai" is used? (Would be interesting to see it used in way that would not be related to physical touching) Does not "pathe / pathos" or something like that fit in here too?

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[Haris Dimitriadis](#) The word aisthanomai, feel, has the same origin, to asthesis, sense. So, senses and feelings in greeg have the same root..aisth..

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[Haris Dimitriadis](#) Also aisthemata, feelings and aisthesis, sense.

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[Matt Jackson](#) Do we have original and extant sources for Democritus around?

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[Haris Dimitriadis](#) We have no original fragments from Democritus. All sources are indirect.

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[Cassius Amicus](#) [Matt Jackson](#) If so i am not aware. With the large Section in Diogenes Laertius on democritus we have the loeb edition which has the greek...

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[Cassius Amicus](#) Here's one link to an older edition of the side-by-side version

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14520477_1873369062893505_2710733894280385405_n.jpg?oh=d0cad08dc14601b76923c01064fc9e4e&a

[Haris Dimitriadis](#) He uses indirect speech. I can't see any original text of Democritus.

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[Matt Jackson](#) I'm very passionate about this. Sorry...I guess I share Democritus' humor.
1f602.png

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14520477_1873369062893505_2710733894280385405_n.jpg?oh=d0cad08dc14601b76923c01064fc9e4e&a

[Haris Dimitriadis](#) Democritus was great. They managed to vanish all his writings. No surprise. The same they did with Epicurus.

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[Matt Jackson](#) It definitely makes me want to research his works further. Is Diogenes Laertius the only source?

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[Haris Dimitriadis](#) There are books on Democritus which refer to various scattered sources. There is no other source as detailed as D.L.

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[Cassius Amicus](#) Great find by [Noks Huffine](#) which I did not see earlier in the DL quote, which is in full here at this link. The full paragraph starts with a reference to necessity, another area in which Epicurus agreed with Democritus. While he may have had his physics right, and may have like to laugh, he may have been more in line with the (later) stoics in terms of Fate and repression of emotion.

45. All things happen by virtue of necessity, the vortex being the cause of the creation of all things, and this he calls necessity. The end of action is tranquillity, which is not identical with pleasure, as some by a false interpretation have understood, but a state in which the soul continues calm and strong, undisturbed by any fear or superstition or any other emotion. This he calls well-being and many other names. The qualities of things exist merely by convention; in nature there is nothing but atoms and void space. These, then, are his opinions.

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[Lives of the Eminent Philosophers/Book IX - Wikisource, the free online library](#)

1. Heraclitus, son of Bloson or, according to some, of Heracon, was a native of Ephesus. He flourished in the 69th Olympiad.[1] He was lofty-minded beyond all other men,[2] and overweening, as is clear from his book in which he says: "Much learning does not teach understanding; else would it have t...

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[Amrinder Singh](#) If we go back to the drawing board and look at what is happening in terms of physical processes in the body, the closest word would be sensation for the 2nd leg of Canon as it is something that arises in us (output) and the word feeling has many different meanings for different people and situations(too vague). Sensation is fairly neutral and if we couple this with pain and pleasure it gives a very narrow and precise definition of the process occurring in one's

body. The use of the word sensation for senses would be incorrect because senses are inputs and sensation is the output. Therefore the three legs IMO would be

1. Senses-Vision, Touch, Hearing, Smell, Taste (Input)
2. Sensations - pain/pleasure (output)
3. Anticipations/Mental Conceptions (output)

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[Amrinder Singh](#) Some discussion re the 3rd point (anticipations/conceptions) posted earlier on another forum :<http://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3...amp;h=UAQHj9Jz8>

safe_image.php?d=AQAHL62epWJPNWk&w=90&h=90&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.epicurean

[Thoughts on Anticipations - EpicureanFriends](#)

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[Haris Dimitriadis](#) Thanjs Amrindet. Excellent arguments.

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[Cassius Amicus Amrinder Singh](#) you are definitely hitting points I would like to see discussed much more deeply. One of those points which you email raises is whether to classify the three legs as inputs or outputs. However I personally tend to consider all three as equivalents in the form of faculties or mechanisms and depending on exactly what we are talking about and describing, I am not sure whether the three legs constitute inputs or outputs, or whether the three legs are "mechanisms" or "faculties" (or some other word) that have both inputs AND outputs, but are not themselves either one....

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[Amrinder Singh](#) The idea of input/output was only to clarify the points I was making and is not a definitive claim in terms of their comprehensive nature. I agree with your assessment to refer them as "mechanisms" or "faculties" for reference purposes.

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[Matt Jackson](#) I just collected every available scrap of Democritean information on the web. I'll delve into this later tomorrow.

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[Cassius Amicus](#) Let me add a few more summary comments here:

In sum, I do not think we are clear on how all these three words interrelate: "Emotion" 'feeling' "passion" (I say "We" but at the very least I will say "I know I am not personally")...[See More](#)

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[Cassius Amicus](#) And as a subset of this issue, I get the impression that "strong emotions" may be nearer the center of the issue. In Epicurus I would think "strong emotions" are good/desirable so long as they are pleasurable, while in Stoic and other viewpoints all strong emotions are bad/undesirable by definition.

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