

Episode 242 - Cicero's OTNOTG 17 - Is Truth A Matter Of Logic?

Post by "Cassius" of August 17, 2024 at 2:27 PM

Welcome to Episode 242 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where we have a thread to discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

Today we are continuing to review Cicero's "On the Nature of The Gods," which began with the Epicurean spokesman Velleius defending the Epicurean point of view. This week will continue into Section 21 as Cotta, the Academic Skeptic, responds to Velleius, and we - in turn - will respond to Cotta in particular and the Skeptical argument in general.

For the main text we are using primarily the [Yonge translation, available here at Archive.org](#). The text which we include in these posts is available [here](#). We will also refer to the public domain version of the Loeb series, which contains both Latin and English, [as translated by H. Rackham](#).

Additional versions can be found here:

- [Frances Brooks 1896 translation at Online Library of Liberty](#)
- [Lacus Curtius Edition \(Rackham\)](#)
- [PDF Of Loeb Edition at Archive.org by Rackham](#)
- [Gutenberg.org version by CD Yonge](#)

A list of arguments presented [will eventually be put together here](#).

Today's Text

XXIV. ...

But where is truth? Is it in your innumerable worlds, some of which are rising, some falling, at every moment of time? Or is it in your atomical corpuscles, which form such excellent works

without the direction of any natural power or reason? But I was forgetting my liberality, which I had promised to exert in your case, and exceeding the bounds which I at first proposed to myself. Granting, then, everything to be made of atoms, what advantage is that to your argument? For we are searching after the nature of the Gods; and allowing them to be made of atoms, they cannot be eternal, because whatever is made of atoms must have had a beginning: if so, there were no Gods till there was this beginning; and if the Gods have had a beginning, they must necessarily have an end, as you have before contended when you were discussing Plato's world. Where, then, is your beatitude and immortality, in which two words you say that God is expressed, the endeavor to prove which reduces you to the greatest perplexities? For you said that God had no body, but something like body; and no blood, but something like blood.

XXV. It is a frequent practice among you, when you assert anything that has no resemblance to truth, and wish to avoid reprehension, to advance something else which is absolutely and utterly impossible, in order that it may seem to your adversaries better to grant that point which has been a matter of doubt than to keep on pertinaciously contradicting you on every point: like Epicurus, who, when he found that if his atoms were allowed to descend by their own weight, our actions could not be in our own power, because their motions would be certain and necessary, invented an expedient, which escaped Democritus, to avoid necessity. He says that when the atoms descend by their own weight and gravity, they move a little obliquely. Surely, to make such an assertion as this is what one ought more to be ashamed of than the acknowledging ourselves unable to defend the proposition. His practice is the same against the logicians, who say that in all propositions in which yes or no is required, one of them must be true; he was afraid that if this were granted, then, in such a proposition as "Epicurus will be alive or dead to-morrow," either one or the other must necessarily be admitted; therefore he absolutely denied the necessity of yes or no.

Can anything show stupidity in a greater degree? Zeno, being pressed by Arcesilas, who pronounced all things to be false which are perceived by the senses, said that some things were false, but not all. Epicurus was afraid that if any one thing seen should be false, nothing could be true; and therefore he asserted all the senses to be infallible directors of truth. Nothing can be more rash than this; for by endeavoring to repel a light stroke, he receives a heavy blow. On the subject of the nature of the Gods, he falls into the same errors. While he would avoid the concretion of individual bodies, lest death and dissolution should be the consequence, he denies that the Gods have body, but says they have something like body; and says they have no blood, but something like blood."

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/61102355>

Post by "Joshua" of August 18, 2024 at 11:50 AM

In [this](#) thread for Episode 226 I laid out my alternative to the Ontological argument. That is a work in progress, but in its current state it should be enough to call into question the validity of producing a being into nature *a priori*.

Post by “Cassius” of August 18, 2024 at 5:38 PM

Another link referenced in this episode - we started off referencing the "Correspondence Theory of Truth" as described here:

[The Correspondence Theory of Truth \(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy\)](#)

Post by “Cassius” of August 18, 2024 at 6:56 PM

Today we kept on topic with the existing thread title, and most of the episode is devoted to discussing the concept of "truth" (which is probably very closely related to the concept of "real").

Here's a section of Diogenes' Laertius' biography that we quoted during the episode:

Quote

[32] Nor is there anything which can refute the sensations. For a similar sensation cannot refute a similar because it is equivalent in validity, nor a dissimilar a dissimilar, for the objects of which they are the criteria are not the same; nor again can reason, for all reason is dependent upon sensations; nor can one sensation refute another, for we attend to them all alike. Again, the fact of apperception confirms the truth of the sensations. And seeing and hearing are as much facts as feeling pain. From this it follows that as regards the imperceptible we must draw inferences from phenomena. For all thoughts have their origin in sensations by means of coincidence and analogy and similarity and combination, reasoning too contributing something. And the visions of the insane and those in dreams are true, for they cause movement, and that which does not exist cannot cause movement.

I have underlined that last sentence because now that the episode is "in the can" I realize that we did not point this out on the air, but when you read that last sentence it is pretty hard not to come to the conclusion that Epicurus was defining "to exist" as "having the capacity to cause movement." That's a very interesting perspective on how to define what "exists" or "what is real" that probably deserves some independent discussion. We often talk about how Epicurus is focusing on whether it is revealed to us by our natural faculties as the definition of something being "real," but it probably should always have been obvious, that given that the faculties themselves are made up of atoms, that the implication of the way Epicurus is going allows us to refine the definition of what is real all the way down to the question "does it have the capacity to cause movement."

This would seem to shift the focus of the question of "what is real" away from a more abstract "Does it exist outside your physical body?" as the test of what we should regard as "real," to a more practical question of something like "does it cause your physical body (which would include your mind) to "move" or "feel impact?"

Post by "Cassius" of August 21, 2024 at 6:54 AM

Lucretius Today Episode 242 - "Is Truth A Matter of Logic?" - is now available:

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/61102355>

Post by "Cassius" of August 21, 2024 at 7:10 AM

This week's episode is now posted, and by coincidence it ends up addressing almost the exact topic which ended up being the major topic of our 20th Zoom last night. Many of us - including Kalosyni in the podcast as to "truth," Tau Phi in discussion last night as to whether to consider this a matter of "re-definition," and Cicero in On Ends as to Epicurus "doing violence to words" - question how best to get a grasp on Epicurus' deviation from convention in the way he describes many important concepts.

Hopefully this episode will prompt further discussion on how to describe what Epicurus is doing. Should what he is doing be considered "redefinition?" Should it be considered "clarification?" What about "clarifying definition," or "redefining clarification?"

Regardless of what words are used to describe it, there is deviation from convention, and it will be useful to think about the best way to describe what is going on and how to convey that to other people.

It's in this context that we have DeWitt's statement that has been cited in many of our recent podcasts. DeWitt calls it "extension of the name" and refers to "application" and "denomination" without using "re-definition":

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

"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.

Post by "Cassius" of August 21, 2024 at 11:08 AM

If anyone happened to listen to this episode for the first hour or so that it was up, I apologize because I had to do some supplemental editing. I think the problem is now largely corrected.

The issue came about because of the continuing trouble i have fixing a meaning on the underlined part of the following quote from Dlogenes Laertius:

Quote

[32] Nor is there anything which can refute the sensations. For a similar sensation cannot refute a similar because it is equivalent in validity, nor a dissimilar a dissimilar, for the objects of which they are the criteria are not the same; nor again can reason, for all reason is dependent upon sensations; nor can one sensation refute another, for we attend to them all alike. Again, the fact of apperception confirms the truth of the sensations. And seeing and hearing are as much facts as feeling pain.

I have a tendency to say (and I am afraid I may have written in the past) that the repetition of receiving the same perception in the same way over time 'confirms' prior perceptions. More reflection causes me to think that's exactly the wrong way to say it. As I see it today, it is repeated observations that confirm "opinions," which we make from the perceptions, but the perceptions themselves are not "confirming" each other. As Lucretius says in Book 4 in the part underlined below:

Quote

[478] You will find that the concept of the true is begotten first from the senses, and that the senses cannot be gainsaid. For something must be found with a greater surety, which can of its own authority refute the false by the true. Next then, what must be held to be of greater surety than sense? Will reason, sprung from false sensation, avail to speak against the senses, when it is wholly sprung from the senses? For unless they are true, all reason too becomes false. Or will the ears be able to pass judgement on the eyes, or touch on the ears? or again will the taste in the mouth refute this touch; will the nostrils disprove it, or the eyes show it false? It is not so, I trow. For each sense has its faculty set apart, each its own power, and so it must needs be that we perceive in one way what is soft or cold or hot, and in another the diverse colours of things, and see all that goes along with colour. Likewise, the taste of the mouth has its power apart; in one way smells arise, in another sounds. And so it must needs be that one sense cannot prove another false. Nor again will they be able to pass judgement on themselves, since equal trust must at all times be placed in them. Therefore, whatever they have perceived on each occasion, is true.

So I have cleaned up what I said about this in the opening of the episode. I need to listen further to see if i repeated the error later, and if so I'll cut that out too. Probably also this will be worth coming back to emphasize next week. i think the correct formulation is that

repeated perceptions over time confirm OPINIONS, or prove them to be incorrect if they are not true, but perceptions over time never confirm or deny prior perceptions.

Perceptions are NOT equal to opinions, and perceptions are never true or false!

Correct?

Post by “Bryan” of August 21, 2024 at 12:16 PM

Quote from Cassius

it is repeated observations that confirm "opinions," which we make from the perceptions, but the perceptions themselves are not "confirming" each other.

I agree, the senses cannot confirm or negate each other.

Quote from Cassius

Perceptions are NOT equal to opinions, and perceptions are never true or false!

62b **"Everything observed [by the senses] or apprehended through attention to [mental] perception is true"**

(τό γε θεωρούμενον Πάν ἢ κατ' ἐπιβολὴν λαμβανόμενον τῆ διανοίᾳ ἀληθές ἐστι)"

Opinions about perceptions can be false, but the perceptions themselves are not false - they must be real because they physically affect us. However, we must think about and judge these "honest" reports of our sensations to figure out the extent that they do, in fact, accurately correspond to external objects and circumstances.

51c **"and regarding this [movement of thought in us], if it [∃] is not affirmed or [A] is contradicted, Falsity is produced → if it [E] is confirmed or [V] is not contradicted, Truth [is produced]"**

(κατὰ δὲ ταύτην, ἐὰν μὲν [∃] μὴ ἐπιμαρτυρηθῆ ἢ [A] ἀντιμαρτυρηθῆ, τὸ Ψεῦδος γίνεται → ἐὰν δὲ [E] ἐπιμαρτυρηθῆ ἢ [V] μὴ ἀντιμαρτυρηθῆ, τὸ Ἀληθές)

A true opinion is established by the full correspondence of that opinion to external objects and their circumstances. If our opinion is not affirmed or is refuted, it is false; but if our opinion is affirmed or not refuted, it is true.

Post by “Cassius” of August 21, 2024 at 12:49 PM

1. I like that chart very much! But given the "difficulty" of the issue (that so many of us are ingrained by orthodoxy to think of *perceptions* or *sensations* as being true or false) I wonder if the "it" in that chart needs to be replaced by "opinion" for clarity's sake. Either a header that states clearly that what is being discussed is opinion, and not perception or sensation, or in each case substitute "opinion" for "it", or maybe even both might be necessary to drive the point home hard enough 😊

2.

[Quote from Bryan](#)

Opinions about perceptions can be false, but the perceptions themselves are not false - they must be real because they physically affect us. However, we must think about and judge these "honest" reports of our sensations to figure out the extent that they do, in fact, accurately correspond to external objects and circumstances.

That brings up another point I may have stumbled over in the podcast. I too am tempted to emphasize that it is important to separate "external objects and circumstances" from "those that are not external." And I do think that's a significant point for many decisions in life, especially as to "what to do" about the thing that is moving or physically affecting us.

But for purposes of the current discussion, I think Epicurus is telling us to consider as "true and real" *anything* that moves us - *external OR internal* . It would be easy to argue that Epicurus would choose to do that as part of emphasizing a standard of reality very different from what Democritus was focusing on when Democritus said something to the effect that only atoms and void "really exist." Seems to me that Epicurus is telling us to regard as "real" anything whatever, inside us or outside us, that can "touch" or "move" us.

The theory of "images" pretty cleanly describes a way that we can be "moved" by the mind being impacted by images of things that have real existence (horses and men) or even by things that don't have real existence, but which come to us through images (centaurs). But I am less clear on what Epicurus would say about "ideas" like "capitalism" or "communism" or whatever. Would it be proper to conclude that a vision of a centaur is "real" because it comes to

us in the form of an image, but "capitalism" is not real because it is purely an idea. I can see people saying that "ideas" can "move" us, but unless the particular idea is embodied in some kind of "image," I am not sure Epicurus would consider that it has the same reality as the image of a Centaur.

I think it's very likely to be shocking (and therefore good to talk about) that Epicurus would say that "*centaurs*" or "*the dreams of madmen* are real" but that "*capitalism* is not real."

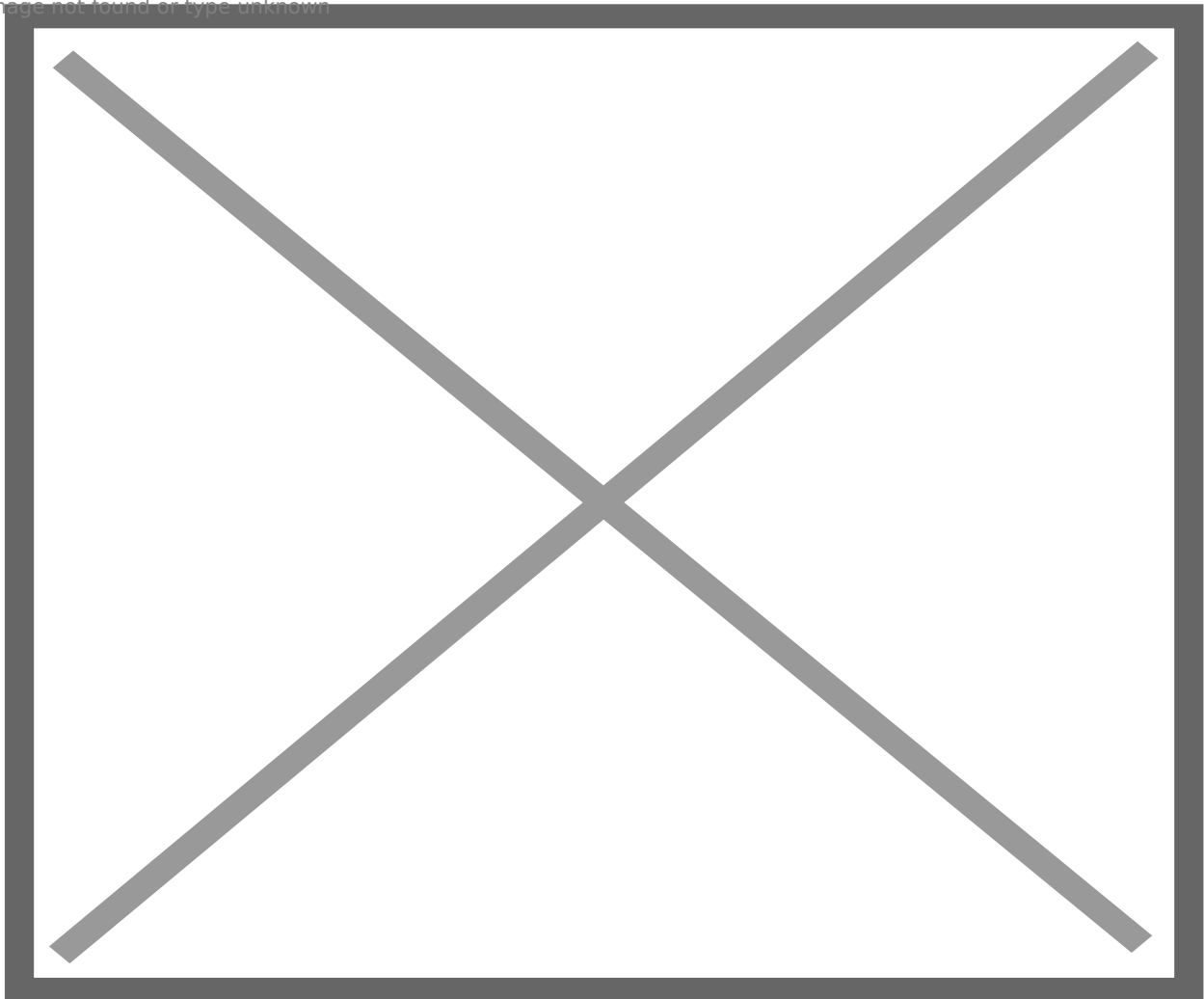
Agree or disagree on any of this?

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 21, 2024 at 2:12 PM

Just adding this to the mix, as why in my mind vision and perception are inseparable and why I am thinking that the sense of sight can be true most of the time (99.9%) but not all of the time:

How vision works:

Image not found or type unknown



[Vision: Keeping Your Eyes on This Prized Sense](#)

Vision is the process that gives you your sense of sight. Learn how it works, what can affect it and how you can maintain and protect it.

my.clevelandclinic.org

Quote

What is vision?

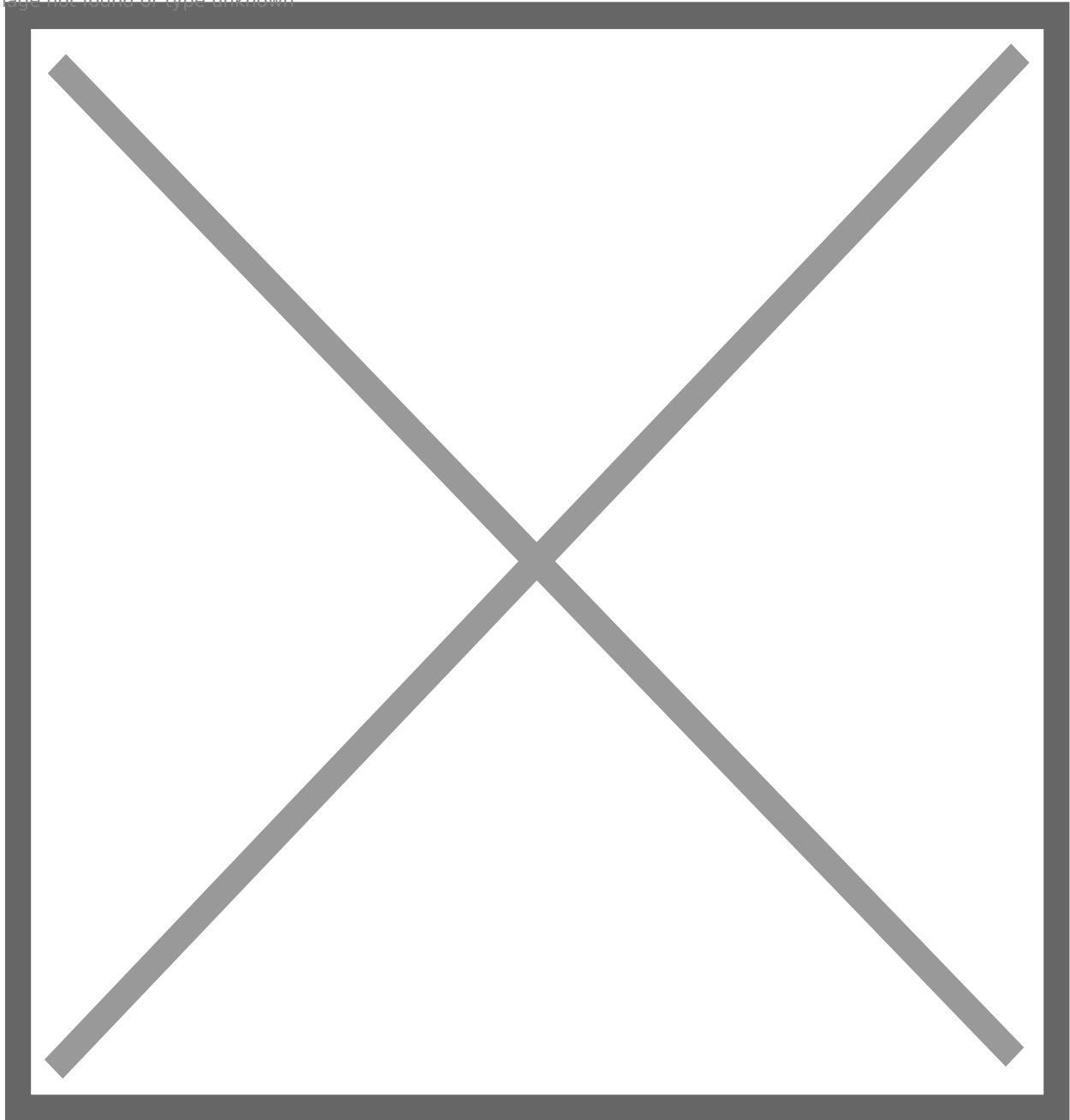
Vision is the process where your [eyes](#) and [brain](#) work together and use light reflecting off things around you to create the ability to see. It's one of the five main senses and a key contributor to how most people understand the world around them.

How does vision work?

Vision starts when your eyes detect light and turn it into coded nerve signals, which then travel through your [optic nerves](#) to your brain. Your brain receives and decodes the signals, and turns them into the pictures you see.

...and this:

Image not found or type unknown



[32 optical illusions and why they trick your brain](#)

Artists and scientists have been creating optical illusions for centuries. Here are 32 mind-bending examples that prove you can't always trust what your eyes...

Quote

Optical illusions play tricks on your brain and can make you see things that aren't really there, from static images swirling around the page to images that stay with you even after you look away. Scientifically, researchers use optical illusions to gain insight into how humans see and process visual information, although the mechanisms behind many of them are still a mystery.

Post by “Bryan” of August 21, 2024 at 2:12 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I wonder if the "it" in that chart needs to be replaced by "opinion" for clarity's sake.

Excellent suggestion, thank you! I have now updated the headers in that chart at 51c.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

"true and real" anything that moves us - external OR internal .

Yes, I agree that this is the case at the level of sensation (as we see in 62b), but at the level of thinking there is a differentiation between subject and object, as well as between true and false (as we see in 51c).

Post by “Cassius” of August 21, 2024 at 2:44 PM

AI transcript of Episode 242 (subject on the downside to gross error, and on the upside to using better grammar than we sometimes spoke!) here:

[Episode 242 - EpicureanFriends Handbook](#)