

# Discussion Plan For Chapter 08 "Sensations, Anticipations, And Feelings" (Norman DeWitt's "Epicurus And His Philosophy")

Post by "Cassius" of April 20, 2018 at 2:40 PM

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Need to be more clear about the meaning of CANON !

## CHAPTER VIII - SENSATIONS, ANTICIPATIONS, AND FEELINGS

### 1. Introduction -

1. There are three criteria of truth, but there is an unfortunate tendency to consider them as only one by focusing the discussion on sensations. This is an error that comes from considering Epicurus to be an "empiricist" in the modern sense, which he was not.
2. What is true is that all three operate together and do not exist separately - they are three distinct reactions occurring in close sequence.
3. In the sense that they are genetic or biological, there are three levels of experience on which these faculties operate: (1) somatic (immediate bodily sensations), (2) social (relationships with others), and (3) emotional (mental fears, hopes, and other emotions which replace immediate bodily sensations as areas of concern as we grow in maturity).

### 2. Sensations

1. These are the five senses: vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch.
2. They are direct physical contacts with external physical reality.
3. They are criteria of truth because they are non-rational - they do not evaluate, they simply report.
4. They are incapable of memory and simply report - without opinion - what they receive at any particular moment.
5. Sensations are "true" in that they report what they observe without injection of any opinion, but this does not mean that they are always accurate to the facts. Vision may truly report that a tower at a distance looks round but we may find when we approach the tower that it is square.

### 3. Epicurus Not An Empiricist

1. Epicurus argued that nothing can refute the sensations but this does not mean that he believed the senses are infallible to the facts. Epicurus held that differences in the observers account for differences in reaction to the same phenomena. Each

- sensation has validity for the observer, but must be checked against other observations to evaluate if it is accurate to the facts.
2. The statement that reason depends on the senses does not mean that the whole content of consciousness derives from the five senses. The faculty of anticipations and the faculty of pleasure and pain provide input to consciousness even though they are not themselves within the five senses.
  3. Epicurus defended the validity of sensations as the faculty by which we come into contact with reality, and as taking precedence over reason, but he did not assert that individual sensations represent absolute truth. Individual senses are valuable for assessing reality without necessarily being true to the facts themselves.
  4. Epicurus observed the example of the stick in the water appearing to be bent and this alone is sufficient to show that he did not believe that literally "all sensations are true." What Epicurus did teach is that we give attention to all sensations, using some sensations to correct the opinion we derive from others. That is, we observe the stick when out from the water and use that observation to correct our opinion of what happens when we see it placed in water.
  5. It is absurd to argue that Epicurus did not take into account common optical illusions such as the stick in water or the tower at a distance.
  6. Thus the value of a sensation can vary from totality to zero depending on the circumstances under which they are received. Immediate sensations are highly trustworthy; sensations about events that are distance are often untrustworthy.
  7. Observations of composite sensations (combinations of color, shape, size, smell, etc) are "true" in the same way noted above, but these do not rank as criteria of truth under the Canon because intelligence has come into play to assemble them. Epicurus held that recognition by the intelligence is subject to the injection of opinion and therefore error, and thus should not be considered as the same level of trustworthiness are the three aspects of the canon. Later Epicureans are recorded to have done so, however, and DeWitt argues this was a mistake.
  8. Because Epicurus was not an empiricist and we cannot consider all sensations to be true to the facts, we must:
    1. Make multiple observations and pay attention to ALL sensations
    2. Check our own sensations against the sensations gathered by others who are observing the same thing.
  9. Skepticism must be shown to be incorrect and rejected.
    1. [PD23](#) - "If you are going to make war on all the sensations, you will not even have a standard by reference to which you shall judge those of them which you say are deceptive."
    2. Epicurus warned against conclusions derived from observation at distances, and here he warred with Plato over the reliability of reaching conclusions based on the movement of stars and planets. As a result of his concern about Plato's belief that the stars/planets were gods, he apparently contended that they were not as large in size as the geometricians contended them to be. His

reasoning was that here on earth the magnitude of a fire does not seem to diminish as fast as the magnitude of other objects seen at a distance. He therefore argued that the size of the sun was only a little larger than what it "appears" to be. (Note: but what did he really mean by "what it appears to be.")

3. Allowing the mind to work "automatically" without correction is where error enters. "It is the automatic mind that errs; it may judge the distant tower to be round; this is the error of "opinion." The discreet observer knows the distant view to be deceptive and suspends judgment until the tower is observed at close hand. A tentative judgment is then confirmed or disproved." In the case of the size of the sun, which is visible but never at close hand, it is reasonable to consider the size of the sun to be less than huge because that opinion was not contradicted by evidence available to him.
10. In sum, the sensations are best viewed as witnesses in court. They do their best to testify "truthfully" but what they report may not be true to the facts because they may not have observed up close and with clarity the thing that they are reporting about. It is up to us to take into consideration the circumstances of their operation and observation, to compare all sensations against each other, and then to make a reasoned evaluation based on all the evidence.
11. "Nowhere in our extant Little Epitome or the Authorized Doctrines do we find the statement "that [all sensations are true](#)." On the contrary, the Epitome begins by urging the student "to give heed to the sensations under all circumstances and especially the immediate perceptions whether of the intelligence or of an)' criterion whatsoever," which manifestly allows some value to all sensations and special value to immediate sensations. At the end of the Epitome the student is warned to check his own observations by those of others. These authentic statements are incompatible with belief in the infallibility of sensation. They presume belief in gradations of value among sensations and also the need of perpetual caution against error."
4. Anticipations - (NOTE: This interpretation differs greatly from the 'modern majority' view, which essentially equates pre-conceptions with concepts. You must decide for yourself if DeWitt is correct.)
  1. Example - "innate sense of justice" - "The innate capacity to distinguish colors is an anticipation of experience no less than the innate capacity to distinguish between justice and injustice."
  2. " The difference is that the color-sense is part of the individual's preconditioning for life in his physical environment and emerges in early childhood, while the sense of justice is part of the preconditioning for life in the social environment and emerges later. developing in pace with experience, instruction, and reflection."
  3. Terminology: Anticipation does not mean "concept" - "The term prolepsis was correctly rendered by Cicero as anticipatio or praenotio and less precisely, though intelligently, by the elder Pliny as divinatio. It is wrongly rendered as "concept" by

those who confuse the general concept of such a thing as an ox with the abstract idea of justice. One scholar prefers "preconception," but perhaps "pre-concept" would be preferable. It seems most advantageous, however, to adhere to "Anticipation" because this is the meaning of the Greek word prolepsis.

#### 5. The Account of Laertius

1. The account of Laertius is approved by many scholars, but DeWitt rejects it as a hodgepodge of Stoic and Epicurean doctrine. Laertius describes preconceptions as concepts - of a man, a horse, or an ox. Objections:
  1. DeWitt says general concepts are formed instantly, not after repeated experience.
  2. Epicurus applies the word to the gods, but we have not had repeated sightings of gods as means of our forming preconcepts about them.
  3. Epicurus refers to preconcepts as applying to justice, which is a different category of things rather than concrete ("brute") objects such as horses and oxen.
  4. "if the formation of the general concept ensues upon acts of sensation, then all elements of anticipation are removed; again, if it is formed as the residuum of acts of sensation, this is a sort of inductive process and no result of a rational process can itself be a primary criterion of truth, which Epicurus declared the prolepsis to be.
  5. If the general concept is the sum of a series of sensations, then the prolepsis is merged with sensation, and the second criterion of Epicurus disappears. This, in turn, would mean that Epicurus possessed no criterion of truth on the abstract levels of thought. Such a conclusion is hardly to be tolerated."

#### 6. The Element of Anticipation

1. Preconceptions must involve an element of "anticipation." - "It is positively stated by Cicero that the use of the term prolepsis was an innovation on the part of Epicurus. It is agreed that this term prolepsis also denotes **some sort** of concept or idea. No one denies that. its proper signification is "anticipation:'. Therefore, if an idea precedes or anticipates something. this can hardly be anything but experience. The said idea must therefore be innate. Quite correctly, therefore, Cicero wrote with studied precision when reporting on the gods of Epicurus, "implanted or rather inborn conceptions of them." (emphasis on "some sort" added)
2. Evidence from Lucretius:
  1. Let the faithful Lucretius be called to the witness stand. Among his more striking and better remembered passages is one that emphasizes the proleptic or anticipatory behavior of all living creatures, including animals. Their first gestures anticipate the activities of their adult state. Children point with the finger before they can talk. Calves butt before they have horns. The cubs of lions and panthers fight with tooth and claw almost before they have teeth and claws. Young birds go through the motions of flying before their wings are fit for flight. Obviously all living things are preconditioned for life in

their terrestrial environment. Is it, then, inconsistent with this observed fact to assume that human beings are preconditioned for life in their social environment?

3. Evidence from Epicurus himself:

1. Basic to his hedonism is the observed fact that all living creatures, brute or human, however young and helpless, reach out for pleasure and shrink from pain. Even before the five senses have begun to perform their parts, long before the dawn of conscious motivation, and long before the development of understanding. pleasure seems to be a good and pain an evil thing. This initial behavior, like the subsequent gestures of play. is at one and the same time prompted by inborn propensities and anticipatory of adult experience. In the growth of the living being and the unfolding of the faculties the attention of Epicurus is manifestly focused upon this principle. the priority of Nature over reason."
2. Quick learning and rejection of Platonism: "Epicurus, on the contrary, since he denied both the preexistence and the survival of the soul. found his explanation in the preconditioning of man by Nature for life in the prospective environment. His word for this phenomenon. Prolepsis or Anticipation. is thus the philosophical antonym of Plato's anamnesis or recollection. and so far is it from being true that "the notion of 'innate ideas' would be wholly repugnant to Epicureanism" that it is part of the marrow of his doctrine. His materialism. on this point, is idealistic Platonism in reverse.

7. Evidences From Specific Contexts - Prolepsis Occurs Four Times in Texts of Epicurus: The first has reference to the divine nature and the second and third to justice; the fourth applies to the concept of time.

1. Letter to Menoeceus: The discussion of the divine nature is found in the letter to the youthful Menoeceus. It is there declared "that the pronouncements of the multitude concerning the gods are not anticipations (prolepseis) but false assumptions."
2. [PD37](#) - "37. Among the things held to be just by law, whatever is proved to be of advantage in men's dealings has the stamp of justice, whether or not it be the same for all; but if a man makes a law and it does not prove to be mutually advantageous, then this is no longer just. And if what is mutually advantageous varies and only for a time corresponds to our concept of justice, nevertheless for that time it is just for those who do not trouble themselves about empty words, but look simply at the facts." The second and third examples of the term prolepsis are found in Authorized Doctrines 37 and 38; the topic is justice. Just as in the case of the divine nature, the first requisite is to discern the essential attribute or attributes. Just as in the case of the divine nature, the first requisite is to discern the essential attribute or attributes. It is Nature that furnishes the norm and implants in men the embryonic notion or prolepsis of justice in advance of all experience. Hence it is called "the justice of Nature," as in Doctrine 31 : "The justice of Nature is a covenant of advantage to the end that men shall not injure one

another nor be injured." Setting aside the idea of the covenant, which is a separate topic, it will be noted that the essential requirement of justice is to protect citizens against injury. Thus "safety" becomes a catchword of Epicureanism. Since the laws are the instruments of justice, it is they that must be tested by this criterion. Like other observers of his time, Epicurus was aware of the diversity of laws from age to age, from city to city and race to race. If a given law serves to protect the individual, it is just; if after a time it ceases to perform this function, it loses the attribute of justice. This is the gist of Doctrines 36, 37, and 38.

3. PD 38 - "Where without any change in circumstances the things held to be just by law are seen not to correspond with the concept of justice in actual practice, such laws are not really just; but wherever the laws have ceased to be advantageous because of a change in circumstances, in that case the laws were for that time just when they were advantageous for the mutual dealings of the citizens, and subsequently ceased to be just when they were no longer advantageous."
4. Time - "The fourth occurrence of prolepsis, although negative in its bearing, is particularly illuminating. It deals with the nature of time. The prolepsis, as has been indicated, reveals the attributes of a thing at their minimum definition. Therefore, Epicurus virtually says that a prolepsis of time is a contradiction in terms, since time has no attributes. His finding is that time is "an accident of accidents," and, if his reasoning be closely scrutinized, time seems to be even less than this. Incidentally, in the text of Epicurus this paragraph on the topic of time follows immediately upon the discussion of attributes and accidents. This juxtaposition confirms the assumption that the prolepsis is rightly interpreted as an anticipatory notion of the essential attributes of the subject of examination.

#### 8. Later Evidences

1. Stoic usage of Prolepsis differed from Epicurean: "The word prolepsis, once launched by Epicurus as a technical term, was taken over by the Stoics who cribbed freely from the sect they vilified. It still enjoyed vogue in Cicero's time but the sharp edges of the original idea had suffered detrition through careless handling. The Stoics had developed the study of formal logic and one ingredient of this was the general concept. This denotes the essential attributes of the subject under examination and, if the thinker be not too meticulous about his categories, it is permissible to speak of the general concept of either justice or an ox. Then by a familiar type of semantic shift it became possible to speak of "the prolepsis of an ox." just as people call a lighting fixture a chandelier even if candles have been replaced by gas or electricity. As Epicurus employed the term, however, it was no more possible to have a prolepsis of an ox than of a duck-billed platypus or a caterpillar tractor; the pre-existence of the idea in advance of the experience was essential.
2. Later Epicureans diverged from Epicurus' own teaching: "Even within Epicurean circles the term prolepsis underwent unjustified extensions. For instance, Epicurus, recognizing Nature as the canon or norm, had asserted that, just as we observe fire

to be hot, snow to be cold, and honey to be sweet, so, from the behavior of newborn creatures, we observe pleasure to be the telos or end. Certain of his followers, however, shaken no doubt by Stoic criticism, took the position that the doctrine was an innate idea. that is, a prolepsis. In strict logic this error was a confusion between *quid* and *quale*. The problem was not to decide what could be predicated of the end or telos but what was the identity of the end. Was it pleasure or was it something else?

3. Philodemus - "Several examples of the word prolepsis occur in the writings of Philodemus, all of them falling in the domain of the abstract. One of these is worthy of special mention. It is found in the essay entitled On the Management of an Estate. Other writers are there criticized for not describing the good manager in conformity with a prolepsis; they concern themselves instead with popular ideas on the subject and then endeavor to hitch the resulting description to the wise man. What they ought to do is to ask themselves what kind of business and what size of business and what sort of management are compatible with a philosophic life and intellectual companionship. This may be a sound procedure to follow in writing an essay of this kind, but it is very questionable whether Epicurus ever thought of ascribing to the human being an innate idea of what a good landlord should be."
4. References in Cicero - (DeWitt says these differ from Epicurean usage) - The procedure is to assume that the interlocutor already possesses a proper preconcept of the object of the quest. folded up in the mind like the leaves in a bud, or wrapped up in a sheet, which was an ancient method of carrying luggage. 'With such assumptions in mind Cicero wrote: "Unfold your intelligence and shake it out that you may see the shape and preconcept (prolepsis) of the virtuous man that is found within." In the same context the reader finds the following: "But once a man has consented to unroll the pre concept that is folded up in his own mind he can readily teach himself that the virtuous man is he who will do a good turn to whom he can and will injure no one unless attacked."
5. References in Lucretius not particularly helpful - "Lucretius affords the student no assistance whatever. He makes no attempt to translate the word prolepsis either by periphrase or coinage. He might well have preceded Cicero in the use of praenotio and anticipatio, which, at least in the nominative case, would have fitted into hexameters. His notities translates only ennoia or ennoema. The two passages in which it is alleged to denote prolepsis exemplify an entirely different doctrine, that nonpurposive Nature is the sole creatrix. Human intelligence can only improve upon Nature's beginnings; man could not invent language before nature had furnished a model in involuntary cries. To this restriction even the gods were subject; they could not have created a universe before Nature had furnished a model."

## 9. Feelings

1. Nature's Go and Stop signals - "'The Feelings are two," wrote Laertius, "pleasure and pain, characterizing every living creature, the one being akin, the other alien, through which the decisions are made to choose or avoid."

2. "The feelings are distinct from the Sensations by two removes: in the meaning of the Canon sensation is restricted to the sensory stimulus: it is the intelligence that registers recognition or nonrecognition; it is the Feelings that register pleasure or pain. These are accompaniments of sensation, as Aristotle observed in advance of Epicurus."
3. Feelings should not be considered identical with sensations: "The prevailing belief that Epicurus was an empiricist has led scholars to merge the Feelings with the Sensations. It is true that both may be called by the Greek word pathc, but this coincidence of predicate is offset by logical absurdities. Since the Sensations are confined to the five senses, the merging of the Feelings with the Sensations would exclude fears and hopes and all the higher emotions. Again, since Epicurus reduces all sensation to touch, the merging of the Feelings would confine these also to touch. Still again, according to Epicurus the higher emotions, which are included in the Feelings, have a different seat from the Sensations, deep in the breast. How then could they be one with the Sensations? Lastly, unless the Feelings are something distinct from both Sensations and Anticipations, Epicurus would lack a criterion on the level of the higher emotions, where the issue of happiness and unhappiness is ultimately decided."
4. Another reason not to merge feelings and sensations is that to do so would remove gradations in pleasures: "It would also be obligatory, should the Feelings be merged with the Sensations, to ignore all gradations in pleasures, which Epicurus did not. Like Plato and Aristotle, he recognized the existence of higher and lower pleasures and he employed the same terminology. The pleasures of the flesh are denoted by the noun hedone and the verb hedomai, the higher pleasures by the noun euphosune and the euphrainomai. For instance, it is the latter verb he employs when he speaks of the "higher enjoyment" experienced by the wise man in attendance upon public spectacles and also when he speaks of the "serene joy" with which the wise man approaches the end of life. He has still another synonym to employ, chara, when he denies that unlimited wealth can bring any "worthwhile happiness," and he uses the same word of that "peak of happiness" that comes of the confident expectation of health of body and peace of mind. These are Feelings but not Sensations in the meaning of the Canon."
5. "Unity of pleasures" does not mean that pleasures and pains of the flesh are on same level as pleasure and pains of the mind.
6. The Feelings operate as criteria on all levels of life, somatic, social, and, if a term may be borrowed from religion to denote the higher emotions, spiritual.
7. Feelings as criteria in reference to divinity: "It is chiefly with reference to the gods and death that the Feelings operate as criteria, as may be inferred from the first two of the Authorized Doctrines, If the individual is rendered miserable by the fear of death and of the possible punishment after death, this misery is a Feeling in the meaning of the Canon and a sure evidence of "false opinion." He must habituate himself to the thought "that [death is nothing to us](#)," that death is incidental to life,

and that "the fullness of pleasure" may be attained within the narrow limits of mortal life."

8. Feelings as a criteria of justice: "The Feelings operate as criteria also in the sphere of justice and injustice. The Pauline doctrine "The power of sin is the law·' is straight Epicureanism. Among sayings of Epicurus covering the point is the following, Authorized Doctrine 34: "Wrongdoing is not an evil in and by itself; the evil lies in the uneasy feeling, amounting to fear, that he will not escape detection by those appointed for the punishment of such offenses," This fear is a Feeling in the meaning of the Canon; it differs from the child's fear of the fire only by being operative on a higher level of understanding."
9. Feelings as a criteria in choice of attitude toward competitive careers - The Feelings also serve as a Criterion in the choice of a proper attitude or diathesis toward competitive careers. For instance, Diogenes of Oenoanda points out "that the career of the orator allows a man no rest and fills him with anxiety for the success of his plea." The extant sayings of Epicurus himself abound in references to the deceitfulness of the quest for riches, power, or fame.
10. Precedence of Feelings over reason: "As a criterion the Feelings may take precedence over reason. Plato, for example, argued endlessly about the meaning of "good." Epicurus scorned this dialectic and arrived at a simple solution. His line of attack is as follows: the greatest good must be associated with the greatest pleasure. This greatest pleasure is easily identified: "What causes the unsurpassable joy is the bare escape from some terrible calamity." This joy arises from the saving of life, the escape from shipwreck, for instance. Therefore life itself is the greatest good. To think of pleasure as the greatest good is an error; pleasure is the telos and is not to be confused with the greatest good. The testimony of the Feeling functioning as a criterion is decisive."

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### **Post by "Mousikos" of May 15, 2019 at 11:51 AM**

This is where I'm a bit out of my depth. Reading this chapter, DeWitt's interpretation of *anticipations* makes total sense to me. If anyone is aware of good criticisms, please link them, so we can discuss their merits.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of May 15, 2019 at 1:03 PM**

Yes Mousikos I agree with you and my position is pretty much DeWitt's. Unfortunately this is an area of controversy that isn't likely to be resolved short of finding new texts in Herculaneum which address it.

There are a series of posts in this forum on it [The Anticipations](#)

But we can discuss details anywhere you wish.