

All Sensations Are True

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1. Explanation

- If Skepticism and Determinism are false, what did Epicurus advocate instead? Epicurus saw that much of the error of conventional thinkers arises from their contention that the faculties given us by nature are incapable of ascertaining truth, and that we need divine revelation or abstract syllogistic logic to determine what is really true. Epicurus vigorously rejected these assertions, and held that the faculties given to us by nature - the five senses, the feelings of pleasure and pain, and the mental anticipatory faculty of prolepsis - are fully sufficient for living in accord with nature.
- Epicurus identified that the perceptions of our natural faculties are not at all the same thing as the opinions which we form after processing those perceptions in our minds. Our natural faculties report their perceptions to the mind "truly," in the sense of "honestly," without adding any overlay of opinion of their own. Neither the eyes nor the ears nor any other faculty have any memory, and they simply relay to the mind what they perceive at any moment. It is in *the mind* where the perceptions are stored and turned into *opinions* about what is being perceived, and it is *the mind* which must undertake the task of processing the perceptions accurately. The eyes do not tell our minds what they see and the ears do not tell our minds what they hear, and so on -- truth and error is in the mind, not in the faculties given by nature.
- The task of determining truth is that of the mind, which requires that we understand both nature and how our faculties process the perceptions provided to us by nature, because our faculties alone are our direct contacts with outside reality. As Lucretius wrote as to our "feelings" in general: "For that body exists is declared by the feeling which all share alike; and unless faith in this feeling be firmly grounded at once and prevail, there will be naught to which we can make appeal about things hidden, so as to prove aught by the reasoning of the mind." (Book 1:418)

2. Citations

1. Epicurus to Herodotus 38 - [We] must keep all our investigations in accord with our sensations, and in particular with the immediate apprehensions whether of the mind or of any one of the instruments of judgment, and likewise in accord with the feelings existing in us, in order that we may have indications whereby we may judge both the problem of sense perception and the unseen. ... Moreover, the universe is bodies and space: for that bodies exist, sense itself witnesses in the experience of all men, and in accordance with the evidence of sense we must of necessity judge of the imperceptible by reasoning, as I have already said.
2. Lucretius 1:418 - For that body exists is declared by the feeling which all share alike; and unless faith in this feeling be firmly grounded at once and prevail, there will be naught to which we can make appeal about things hidden, so as to prove aught by the reasoning of the mind.
3. Lucretius 4:478 - 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.

4. Torquatus speaking for Epicurus in On Ends 1:64 - Moreover, unless the constitution of the world is thoroughly understood, we shall by no means be able to justify the verdicts of our senses. Further, our mental perceptions all arise from our sensations; and if these are all to be true, as the system of Epicurus proves to us, then only will cognition and perception become possible. Now those who invalidate sensations and say that perception is altogether impossible, cannot even clear the way for this very argument of theirs when they have thrust the senses aside. Moreover, when cognition and knowledge have been invalidated, every principle concerning the conduct of life and the performance of its business becomes invalidated.
Epicurus to Herodotus 51 - (Yonge) "And, on the other side, error could not be possible, if we did not receive some other motion also, a sort of initiative of intelligence connected, it is true, with direct representation, but going beyond that representative. These conceptions being connected with direct perception which produces the representation, but going beyond it."
5. Epicurus On Nature Book 28, Sedley trans, fr. 13, col. 6 inf. - "I also frequently reflected that if, when I raised difficulties which someone might have turned against us, he should claim that what used to be assimilated from ordinary language was the same as used to be practiced in the written work, many might well conclude that in those days false opinion was represented in that language, whether through an empirical process, an image-based process, or a theoretical process, or through a non-empirical process, not following one of our current divisions, but simply arising from an internal movement; but that now, because the means of expression is adapted to additional ends, discrimination provides a lead towards the truth. However, let no one ever try to get even with you by linking with you any trace of this suspicion; but [turn] to the entire faculty of empirical reasoning..."
6. (Aetius 4.8.10) "Leucippus, Democritus, and Epicurus say that sensation and thought arise in the soul from images that approach from outside, for neither of these can occur to anyone without the image falling upon him."
7. (Aetius 4.9.5 - 6) "Epicurus says that every sensation and every impression is true, but of the opinions some are true and some false; and sensation gives us a false picture in one respect only, namely with regard to objects of thought; but the impression does so in two respects, for there is impression of both sense objects and objects of thought. Parmenides, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Democritus, Epicurus, and Heraclides say that the particular sensations of their own object occur in accordance with the matching sized of the pores, each of the sense objects corresponding to each sense."
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3. Notes:

1. Major Implications: Error does not occur in the senses, but in the mind in forming opinions about what the sensations are reporting.
2. Find out more in our [Canonics Forum](#)