

II.—Epicurus: All Sensations Are True

NORMAN W. DEWITT

VICTORIA COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

The aim of this article is to show reasons for believing that the statement in the heading is false as usually understood. It is absurd; the documentation is deficient, misleading, and from prejudiced sources; advocates of its validity go beyond their authorities. It is inconsistent with Epicurus' theory of perception, his terminology, his account of vision, his classifications, his treatment of the criteria in his Principal Doctrines, his account of heavenly phenomena in the letter to Pythocles, and his recommendations to students. Ancient proofs of it are polemical sophistries. Modern misinterpretations have arisen from the ambiguity of *ἀληθής*, which has three meanings in Epicureanism: 1. real or self-existent; 2. relatively true; 3. absolutely true. Sensations have been confused with judgments.

It is not a difficult task to find both general and specific reasons for doubting the truth of the allegation that Epicurus believed all sensations to be true in the sense of dependable. Of general reasons the most cogent is the absurdity of the idea. It contradicts human experience and tends to equate the sensations of madmen and the sane. It also diminishes the necessity of establishing the criteria of truth apart from the sensations, and it raises the question why Epicurus should have gone to such pains to set up a canon ranking in importance with his physics and ethics.

Another reason of a general nature is the character of the documentation and the bias of its sources. Explicit evidence in the literary remains of Epicurus is extremely scanty and the implicit evidence has been largely overlooked. The external testimonia derive chiefly from the writings of Cicero and Plutarch, both of whom were interested in placing Epicurus in an unfavorable light. Lastly, no ancient philosopher was so universally calumniated as Epicurus and modern scholarship has not yet emancipated itself from the entails of inherited detraction.

The zeal of these detractors is sufficient to place the impartial student keenly on his guard. John Masson wrote:¹ "The first principle of the Epicurean theory of knowledge is that all sensations are of themselves reliable." This goes beyond all authority. Epicurus undoubtedly did say that all sensations were true but this is

¹ *Lucretius, Epicurean and Poet* (London, 1909) 132.

not to say that they are all reliable. He assumed that their reliability varied according to distances. Neither is it right to speak here of a "first principle." There can be no comparison among essentials. The canon was based upon three things, the sensations, the feelings, and the general concepts.² These formed a tripod,³ and one leg of a tripod cannot be more important than another.

Specific reasons call for fuller discussion. According to Epicurus the act of perception is a click of recognition between a presentation from without and a general concept within.⁴ For example, let us assume with Diogenes Laertius that a horse or a cow stands within the range of vision.⁵ From its body a stream of images, *εἶδωλα*, impinges upon the eyes of the spectator. This exerts a pressure, *ἐπηρεισμός*,⁶ which causes a motion or reaction, *κίνησις*,⁷ of which the mind, *διάνοια*, takes cognizance. If coincidence occurs between the impressed image and one of the general concepts, *κοιναι νοήσεις*,⁸ or anticipations, *προλήψεις*,⁹ then recognition, *ἐπαίσθησις*, takes place and the result is an *ἐπαίσθημα*. For instance, the spectator recognizes the animal as a horse. Thus the Epicurean theory of perception or apperception is essentially one of recognition and in this article will be so named.

The process may be stated as a formula or as an equation: sensation plus general concept equals a recognition. When this is fulfilled the sensation is true. Laertius states it clearly as a general principle:¹⁰ "the fact of the occurrence of the recognitions guarantees the truth of the sensations." This statement, however, implies a negative: "the non-occurrence of the recognitions reveals the falsity or indecisiveness of the sensations." This would be the case if the horse or the cow were so distant or the light so dim that recognition was impossible. If, on the contrary, all sensations were true, as is alleged, every sensation would result in a recognition and there would be no difference between an *αἴσθησις* and an *ἐπαίσθησις*, which is so absurd as to call for no further argument.

² Diog. Laert. 10.31.

³ He was accused of borrowing it from the *Tripod* of Nausiphanes: D.L. 10.14.

⁴ Nowhere expressly stated but inferable from numerous passages.

⁵ D.L. 10.33.

⁶ *Ibid.* 50.

⁷ *Ibid.* 51.

⁸ *Ibid.* 123, or *ἐννοιαί* 69, 77.

⁹ *Ibid.* 124.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 32.

In spite of the fact that Epicurus professed to avoid the creation of technical terms¹¹ he clearly indicated by the terminology he employed the difference between true and false presentations. A true presentation is a *φαντασία*¹² or a *φανταστική ἐπιβολή*¹³ while all others are styled *φαντάσματα*¹⁴ or *φαντασμοί*.¹⁵ For example, in one and the same context he calls the visions of dreamers and their likes *φαντασμοί* in contrast to a *φανταστική ἐπιβολή*,¹⁶ and Laertius employs the synonym precisely when he styles the visions of madmen *φαντάσματα*.¹⁷ Heavenly phenomena are denoted by Epicurus himself by one or other of these terms¹⁸ because they belong in the class of *τὰ ἀφανῆ*,¹⁹ things situated beyond the range of accurate observation.

The phrase *φανταστική ἐπιβολή* is itself a reason for rejecting the statement that all sensations are true. The word *ἐπιβολή*²⁰ is good Attic only in the sense of "addition" or "onslaught" and it is not listed in Diels' *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, but in Iamblichus and in the Greek commentaries on Aristotle²¹ it is frequent in the meaning "view," both in visual and in intellectual denotations. For the reason that it is a neutral term, implying neither truth nor falsity, it usually requires definition: thus operations of the mind are called by Epicurus *ἐπιβολαὶ τῆς διανοίας*,²² and these if true, are styled *φανταστικάί*. The usage is similar with the sensations: used alone, *ἐπιβολή* would be as neutral as *αἴσθησις*; it requires the addition of *φανταστική* to denote a true sensation.²³ This practice would be senseless if, as is alleged, all sensations are true.

The Epicurean theory of vision is too well known to call for redescription. It will here suffice to call attention to the fact that all images discharged by external objects are subject to detrition

¹¹ *Ibid.* 13,37–38,72.

¹² *Ibid.* 28, 50 *bis*, 80; Norman W. DeWitt, *Περὶ Φαντασίας*, *TAPhA* 70 (1939) 414–427.

¹³ D.L. 10.50, 51, 147.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 75 *bis*, 88, 102, 110.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 51.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 51.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 32.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 88, 102, 110.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 104.

²⁰ DeWitt, *op. cit.* (see note 12) 421 and note 17.

²¹ See previous note.

²² D.L. 10.38, 51, 147.

²³ The later Epicureans would not have added the *φανταστικάί ἐπιβολαί* to the criteria unless they denoted forms of truth: D.L. 10.31.

during their passage from the source to the eyes of the observer.²⁴ Those from the greater distances are entirely dispersed; those from intermediate distances are blurred, and only those from nearer objects are capable of resulting in recognitions. The truth of these statements is not only assumed but, as I believe, expressly stated, for in the long paragraph treating of the streams of images Epicurus is greatly concerned to explain their frequent failure to reach the observer.²⁵ Clear vision is stated to depend upon high velocity and the absence of interference, "because interference and non-interference are equivalent to speed and slowness." Following this comes a brief digression; then he resumes by saying that the unsurpassable fineness of the images accounts for their unsurpassable speed, all maintaining an even course "according as no obstacle or few obstacles obstruct an infinite number of them, but at the outset many obstacles do obstruct somewhat an infinite number of them."²⁶ Next he speaks of the instantaneousness of the creation of the images, of the uninterrupted continuity of the flow, and of their capacity to preserve for a long time the relative position and arrangement of the atoms in the solid object, "even if at times confused." In all this it is manifest that Epicurus, while explaining the mechanism of vision, feels obliged to account for its limitations, which would not have been the case had he believed that all sensations were true in the sense of reliable.

Cicero alleged that Epicurus abolished definitions, distinctions, and classifications.²⁷ This is one of his misleading accusations, a half-truth. It is perfectly true that Epicurus discouraged the pursuit of such studies as rhetoric and logic, because he believed them

²⁴ Hermann Usener, *Epicurea* (Leipzig, 1887) frag. 247, p. 180, 24-36; Lucr. 4.353-359.

²⁵ D.L. 10.46-48.

²⁶ At the end of the sentence the text is corrupt but no new word need be introduced. I propose to read: *πρὸς τὸ ἀπείροις αὐτῶν μηθὲν ἀντικόπτει ἢ ὀλίγα ἀντικόπτει, πολλὰ δὲ καὶ ἀπείροις εὐθὺς ἀντικόπτει τι*. The MSS have *πρὸς τῷ ἀπείρῳ* for my *πρὸς τὸ ἀπείροις*, *πολλαῖς* for my *πολλὰ*, and *ἀντικόπτει* for my *ἀντικόπτει*. Bailey, *Epicurus* (Oxford, 1926) reads *πρὸς <τῷ> τῷ ἀπορρῷ* and retains *πολλαῖς*, making the latter refer to atoms, which in the previous twenty-five lines have not been mentioned. To him it then seems to mean: "and besides nothing or very few things hinder their emission by collisions, whereas a body composed of many or infinite atoms is at once hindered by collisions." I doubt whether the text justifies this version; Hicks, in the Loeb translation adopts Bailey's emendation but by an oversight fails to put it into Greek text. In his *Stoic and Epicurean*, 233-234, appears a quite different version. According to Bailey's note the foreign editors are of various minds.

²⁷ *De Fin.* 1.7.22.

to lead to vanity and ostentation;²⁸ there was danger of them becoming ends in themselves. Yet he would have been a fool to ignore them as instruments of knowledge. Even in the scant sixty-eight pages of text surviving from his writings there is no paucity of admirable definitions, distinctions, and classifications. He does not parade them, it is readily admitted, but by his casual use it may be seen that he divided phenomena into such classes as *δηλα*—*ἄδηλα*, *φανερὰ*—*ἀφανῆ*, and *ὄρατά*—*ἀόρατα*. The invisible world of atoms and void belongs in the first and third classes.²⁹ Heavenly phenomena are *ἀφανῆ*,³⁰ because though visible, they are beyond the range of clear and dependable vision. The use of these terms should alone suffice to show that in his thinking not all sensations were regarded as true.

A like conclusion may be drawn from his casual division of sensations into *τὰ προσμένοντα*³¹ and *τὰ παρόντα*.³² The former must await confirmation, *ἐπιμαρτύρησις*,³³ while the latter are already dependable evidences, *ἐναργεῖαι* or *ἐναργήματα*. Of the former the most familiar example is that of the tower, which must await the nearer view to determine if it be round or square.³⁴ One of the urgent warnings to students is to attend diligently to *τὰς παρούσας ἐπιβολάς*,³⁵ the immediate perceptions, whether of the mind or the senses, a quite unnecessary caution if impressions from a distance had possessed in his thought equal validity with close views.

Those who have taken Cicero at his word when he accused Epicurus of abolishing distinctions will find their acquiescence disturbed by No. 23 of the Principal Doctrines: "If you fight against all the sensations, you will not even have a standard by reference to which you may judge those of them which you say are deceptive." From this it is justifiable to infer that Epicurus believed in sifting the sensations, rejecting some and accepting others. Had he accepted all sensations his position would have been equally absurd as that of the sceptics who rejected all. Epicurus was too good a controversialist to have placed himself in that predicament.

²⁸ *Sent. Vat.* 45.

²⁹ D.L. 10.38 *bis*, 39; 59, 62.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 104.

³¹ *Ibid.* 38, 147 *bis*.

³² *Ibid.* 147; cf. 82 *bis*.

³³ *Ibid.* 147; verb, 50, 51 *bis*.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 34; Lucr. 4.353–363, 500–506.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 38; cf. 82.

Equal cause for rejecting Cicero's specious criticism may be found in No. 24 of the Principal Doctrines, which, somewhat freely translated, begins as follows: "If you reject a given sensation and fail to distinguish between (1) the judgment formed and (2) the impression awaiting confirmation and (3) the impression already made clear by virtue of the sensation and (4) the feelings and (5) every valid judgment of the mind, you will by the absurd judgment (No. 1 above) throw into confusion all the rest of the sensations with the result that you will reject the whole criterion."

Certainly even Cicero would have been compelled to admit that this sentence was the product of a mind that made distinctions, *divisiones*, which, as he alleged, Epicurus had abolished. Let us examine it with care. First of all, it is manifestly directed against the sceptics, who denied the validity of the sensations. Second, if, as was done by them, all sensations are rejected, the result must be a state of doubt or indecision, *ἀκρισία*, and indecision is equivalent to unhappiness or *ταραχή*. This statement is not an inference of the writer of this article. It is clearly inferable from the preceding Principal Doctrine, No. 22: "We must take into account the real end (of Nature) and every dependable sensation, to which we refer our judgments as a standard; otherwise everything will be filled *with indecision and turmoil*." This furnishes the reason why in No. 23 he introduces the feelings, *τὰ πάθη*. Indecision or turmoil of mind is to Epicurus a pathological condition. It is a sickness of the soul,³⁶ which must be remedied. The cure is to be found in the study of philosophy, of which the fruit is a firm faith in knowledge, *πίστις βέβαιος*.³⁷ This, in its turn, can be attained only if we know the end established by Nature, *τὸ τέλος τῆς φύσεως*, mentioned in No. 25, and along with it must be taken into account every dependable sensation, *πᾶσαν τὴν ἐνάργειαν*. This statement would be meaningless if all sensations were true.

We are now in a position to interpret the rest of No. 24. Let us take the trite example of the distant tower. It is possible to recognize it as a tower. This is "the impression already made clear by virtue of the sensation," *τὸ παρὸν ἤδη κατὰ τὴν αἰσθησιν*. It cannot as yet, however, be determined whether the tower is round or square. This is "the impression awaiting confirmation," *τὸ*

³⁶ The analogy between medicine and philosophy is assumed by Epicurus: D.L. 10.122, 138; *Sent. Vat.* 54 (Us. 220).

³⁷ D.L. 10.63, 85.

προσμένον. Yet the unwary person decides, let us say, that the tower is round. This is "the judgment formed," τὸ δοξαζόμενον. Such an unwary person represents those who accept all sensations as true and reliable. Their error is dealt with in the rest of the Doctrine: "but if in your inferential ideas you shall accept as true both every impression that awaits confirmation and every impression that does not await it, you will not eliminate the one that is false and the result will be that you will have preserved every ground of controversy and litigation between truth and error." Such reasoning is not characteristic of a man who abolished distinctions and believed all sensations to be true.

Those who have given credence to the paradox that "the senses cannot be deceived,"³⁸ would find disquieting reading in the letter to Pythocles. Heavenly phenomena are there classed among the ἀφανῆ,³⁹ that is, φαντάσματα or φαντασμοί,⁴⁰ which fail to register in the mind a sure recognition or ἐπαίσθημα. Consequently, the evidences for explaining them must be sought in earthly phenomena, τὰ παρ' ἡμῶν φαινόμενα,⁴¹ which are ἐνάργεια or ἐναργήματα. The latter "are observed as they are while the phenomena in the heavens are not."⁴² In one passage it is observed that the impression of color is impaired by distance more rapidly than the impression of size⁴³ and that fires in the distance may be larger or smaller than they seem to be.⁴⁴ There is another passage of somewhat dubious meaning which Bailey translates as follows: "But those who assume one cause fight against the evidence of phenomena and fail to ask whether it is possible for men to make such observations."⁴⁵ It may be questioned whether this is true to the text but it may be true to the meaning, and if so, the translator has scored a point against himself, for, as will be shown, he champions the alleged doctrine of the infallibility of all sensations.

In the brief treatment of the same topic of heavenly phenomena in the letter to Herodotus may be found a pungent sentence in which students are exhorted "to despise those who do not under-

³⁸ R. D. Hicks, *Stoic and Epicurean* (New York, 1910) 215.

³⁹ D.L. 10.104.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 88, 102, 110.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 88.

⁴² *Ibid.* 87.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 91, lemma.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 91.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 98.

stand things that owe their existence or occurrence to a single cause or to several causes and *concede clear vision from distances.*"⁴⁶ In the same letter he notes that visual images are often blurred⁴⁷ and he notes that sounds are sometimes so indistinct as merely to render us aware of something external.⁴⁸ Toward the end of the letter⁴⁹ is to be found one of his casual classifications, that of the sensations into *κοιναι* and *ἴδιαι*, those that are shared with others and those that are peculiar to the individual. Students are urged to attend to both, that is to pool their experiences. This procedure was calculated to multiply the checks against error, which would hardly be needful if all sensations were believed to be true.

It has been remarked by Bailey that "the Epicureans rejected both the Platonic dialectic and the Aristotelian logic."⁵⁰ This is true: Metrodorus wrote *Against the Dialecticians* and nine books *against the Sophists*;^{50a} Hermarchus wrote *Against Plato* and *Against Aristotle*.^{50b} Both were contemporaries of Epicurus and were possibly delegated to these tasks by the master. The Megarians he dealt with himself.⁵¹ Thus the school was bred in controversy. It would therefore be a mistake to think that the members lacked smartness. Even in sophistries Epicurus was no novice. The proof he advances for the infinity of the universe is a specious fallacy.⁵² Sheer sophistry is the famous defence of the dependability of the sensations which he seems to have put forward in his controversy with the sceptics. At any rate, both Lucretius and Laertius have recorded it.⁵³

This argument has three prongs: 1. a similar sensation cannot refute a similar, because they are equivalent in validity; 2. dissimilar cannot refute dissimilar, because their spheres of validity are

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 80. Bailey and Hicks both adopt Usener's neat but needless emendation, *παριδόντων*. Sextus Empiricus rightly notes that *φαντασία* equals *ἐνάργεια* in Epicurean usage: Usener, 247, p. 179.20-21.

⁴⁷ D.L. 10.48.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 52.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 82.

⁵⁰ *Op. cit.* (see note 26) 413 foot.

^{50a} D.L. 10.24.

^{50b} *Ibid.* 24-25.

⁵¹ D.L. 10.27.

⁵² *Ibid.* 41; Lucr. 1.958-964; Cic. *De Div.* 2.50.103. His argument would be just as valid if the universe were only a mile wide. Naturally there is no point of view thinkable outside of *τὸ πᾶν*.

⁵³ D.L. 10.32; Lucr. 4.478-521.

not the same; 3. reason cannot refute the sensations, because all reason depends upon the sensations.

Of these three sophistries the first is the shallowest: a similar sensation cannot refute a similar. For example, the observer sees that the oar in the water appears to be bent. This sensation is true. Yet the observer can take the oar out of the water and see that it is not bent. The eyes have refuted the eyes, as even Plutarch admitted.^{53a}

The second sophistry is the silliest: dissimilar cannot refute dissimilar. Let us say that the observer hears the bleating of a sheep; the sense of taste is powerless to deny the evidence of the ears. Again, if the hand feels the coldness of snow the ears cannot deny the evidence of touch. Or again, the nose cannot deny that to the eyes the oar in the water appears to be bent. It is readily admitted, of course, that the general statement, one sense cannot refute another, possesses a specious semblance of profundity, but it is effective as an argument only if the adversary is deceived. Its function is exclusively defensive. As a proof of the infallibility of the sensations its value is nil, though it is an excellent proof of the smartness of Epicurus, whom Cicero declared to be *inermis ac nudus* on the side of logic.⁵⁴

Far more deceptive, because neither so shallow nor so silly, is the third prong of the argument: reason cannot refute the sensations because reason is dependent upon the sensations. This is true in one sense and false in another. The sense in which it is true is this: reason in the aggregate cannot refute sensation in the aggregate, because reason depends upon the senses for its data. The sense in which it is false is this: reason in the aggregate cannot refute the particular sensation. Reason, it may be observed, here means that common reservoir of experience which accumulates from the observation of the two classes of sensation, *κοιναί* and *ἰδιαί*, to which the individual was urged to attend diligently.⁵⁵ Of this it is the proper function to check the truth or falsity of the individual sensation. For example, the inexperienced or thirst-crazed traveller in the desert may be deceived by a mirage of water in the sky, but the sane traveller, drawing upon the experience of other travellers along with his own, knows it to be an illusion. In this sense reason con-

^{53a} *Contra Coloten* 25.1121c (Us. p. 186.18–20).

⁵⁴ *De Fin.* 1.7.22.

⁵⁵ D.L. 10.82.

stantly refutes the sensations. As a principle it is assumed, therefore, that not all sensations are true.

Such of the testimonia of external origin as seem to support belief in the infallibility of sensation are readily explained in other ways. Of these none is more familiar than the words of Cicero: qui(sensus) si omnes veri erunt, ut Epicuri ratio docet, tum denique poterit aliquid cognosci et percipi.⁵⁶ In this text "verus" stands for ἀληθής in the Greek testimonia and it is not found there to be replaced by more specific terms such as ἀψευδής. This leaves room for ambiguity in all versions: the meaning may be "true" in the sense of "reliable" and its synonyms, or it may be "real" in the sense of independently existing. The visions of madmen and dreamers, according to Epicurus, are true in the latter sense but not in the former; they are not φαντασίαι but φαντάσματα or φαντασμοί. To this ambiguity may be traced the contention that Epicurus believed all sensations to be reliable.

The above sentence of Cicero declares that the possibility of knowledge depends, not upon the infallibility of all sensations, but upon their reality, that is, their material origin; they must have their cause in material discharges from material objects. To Epicurus this is the only possible contact between man and external reality. The position so taken has a bearing upon his theory of perception. On a previous page I defined this as a click of recognition between a presentation from without and a general concept within. In that connection it was not necessary to mention the part played by language. Now this is necessary. According to Epicurus, Nature, not man, originated language.⁵⁷ Perception is a triangular process, a click of recognition between a presentation from without, a general concept within, and a name.⁵⁸ This is its simplest form and results in a simple predication: ἄνθρωπος ἐστίν, "It is a man." Having learned this the student is enabled to understand the verborum vis et natura orationis, "the significance of words and the nature of predication."⁵⁹ This, to Epicurus, is the meaning of meaning. The name is an integral part of the perception or recognition. If the name fails to suggest itself, the sensation falls short of registering truthfully.

⁵⁶ *De Fin.* 1.20.64.

⁵⁷ D.L. 10.75-76; *Lucr.* 5.1028-1090.

⁵⁸ D.L. 10.33, 37-38.

⁵⁹ *De Fin.* 1.19.63.

There remains a challenging argument against Epicurus which I quote from Bailey because he states it in an extreme form:⁶⁰ "Now Epicurus saw clearly enough that to admit the falsity of a single sensation would overthrow his whole system: for if one sensation is false, there is no reason why any should be true, for all have equal validity." The reasoning here is such as to leave room for several doubts. 1. About the question of equal validity: The distant view will never possess the validity of the near view; there must be infinite degrees of validity graded from zero upwards. 2. The argument in this form, so far as I have discovered, is found only in three passages of Cicero.^{60a} 3. These passages all stem from works written after the death of Tullia, which committed him definitely to the campaign against Epicureanism. 4. He never enlarged upon his reasoning, leaving the ambiguous word "false" undefined. This invites us to recognize a bit of smart polemic.

The fifth flaw is especially damaging. A basis of support is revealed by Bailey's footnote to be sought in No. 24 of the Principal Doctrines, which begins: *εἴ τιν' ἐκβαλεῖς ἀπλῶς αἰσθησιν*. In his *Epicurus* he translates this, omitting *ἀπλῶς* by an oversight, "if you reject a single sensation." This amounts to reading Cicero's language into the text, *si unus sensus semel in vita mentitus sit*.^{60b} The Greek text justifies no such precision, which would call for *εἰ καὶ μίαν αἰσθησιν ἐκβαλεῖς* or perhaps *εἰ αἰσθησιν ἡντιοῦν*. Neither is any such precision needful for reading intelligently the remainder of the Doctrine. The correct rendering seems to be "if you shall reject absolutely any given sensation."

The flaws mentioned above along with the forced translation are perhaps sufficient to nullify the argument as Bailey framed it, but the simplest form of the criticism may be refuted with equal certainty. Cicero very astutely left it in such a shape:⁶¹ *si ullum sensus visum falsum est, nihil percipi potest*. Yet, whatever the wording may be, the answer is the same: the example of the oar in the water alone and by itself refutes the criticism. Visually the presentation is true⁶² but it is false to the fact; it lies. No one, however, is deceived. The individual is at liberty to take the oar

⁶⁰ *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus* (Oxford, 1928) 253.

^{60a} *N.D.* 1.25.70; *Acad.* 2.25.79; 2.32.101.

^{60b} *Acad.* 2.25.79.

⁶¹ *Acad.* 2.32.101.

⁶² *Lucr.* 4.436-442, 462-468.

out of the water and let the eyes refute the eyes. All the senses function as checks upon themselves and upon one another. They are recognized criteria and exist for this purpose. If all the sensations were true in the sense of reliable, there would be no need of other criteria. The establishment of a canon presumes that some sensations, and a multitude of them, will be indecisive or misleading.

"Epicurus drew no distinction between saying that a thing was *ἀληθές* and saying that it was *ὑπάρχον*."⁶³ This is the statement of Sextus Empiricus, who is almost unique among critics in exhibiting no prejudice against Epicurus. It is he also who clearly defines *ἀληθής* in another sense, which in modern parlance would be "true" in the sense of "photographic."⁶⁴ For example, the near view of the tower shows it to be large and square; the distant view receives it as small and round. Both of these, he says,^{64a} according to the Epicureans, are equally true in the sense that the image, *φαντασία*, has registered itself with fidelity. In the same passage it is said that to declare the one view to be true and the other false is just as naïve as to say that the distant sound of clashing cymbals or of a shout is false because it is faint and the near sound is true because it is loud. On this principle there may be numberless true views of the tower and numberless true auditions of a sound. This is a very satisfactory exposition. There is nothing in Lucretius to equal it for lucidity; at times the poet took rather too much for granted.

Yet there is one fundamental upon which all our authorities seem to fail us, the functioning of the criteria. The lexicon rightly defines a criterion as "a means for judging or trying." Too often in our handbooks it is assumed to be the agency of judgment. If the data be assembled, even though explicit statements are lacking, Epicurus will be found to be clear on this point. The criteria themselves perform no function beyond furnishing the evidence for a judgment. The second factor, which may or may not be operative, is the involuntary judgment or opinion, *δόξα*, or *δοξαστική ἔννοια*:⁶⁵ for example, it is hastily inferred that the tower is round. This factor is no more, or little more, rational than the sensation

⁶³ Usener, *op. cit.*, frag. 244.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, frag. 247, p. 180.6-36 and p. 181.1-6.

^{64a} *Ibid.*, lines 29-36.

⁶⁵ *Rat. Sent.* 24 or D.L. 10.147.

itself. The third factor is the intellect, *διάνοια*,⁶⁶ which functions like a judge, sifting and weighing the evidence furnished by the criteria. This factor alone is rational.

Truth and error are assumed to be litigants. Between them there is a legal contest, *ἀμφισβήτησις* or *κρίσις*.⁶⁷ The chief witnesses are the sensations and all are truthful but their evidence may favor error; one sensation may testify that the oar in the water is bent but other sensations will testify that it is not, and the weight of the evidence decides in favor of the truth. Opinion, on the contrary, the involuntary and unreasoned action of the mind, may testify truthfully or falsely.⁶⁸ Supplementary evidence is therefore necessary, which the criteria furnish. This may be corroborative or the opposite, *ἐπιμαρτύρησις* or *ἀντιμαρτύρησις*. The final judgment takes the form of a predication, *κατηγόρημα*, which is the function of the intellect, *διάνοια*, guided by rational procedure, *κατὰ λόγον*.

Thus "true" has three meanings: 1. true in the sense that *τὸ ἀληθές* equals *τὸ ὄν* or *τὸ ὑπάρχον*, self-existent or arising from the self-existent; in this sense all sensations are true; 2. true in a relative sense, as all visual or auditory sensations are true when judged relative to the distance from the external cause; 3. true in an absolute sense, as a judgment is true. Of this absolute truth the sensations are not judges, only witnesses.

What then shall we say was the meaning of the statement "all sensations are true" as Epicurus framed it? All answers must be inferential or interpretative because we have no word direct from the author himself. I believe that the only real threat to his theory of knowledge arose from the possibility of self-created fantasies as in the case of dreamers or the insane. Hence arises his insistence that even dreams must possess a material basis. If this is correct, then *ἀληθής* is synonymous with *τὸ ὑπάρχον*, just as Sextus Empiricus asserted. All other problems of sensation were soluble by the canon.

His theoretical problem is to be clearly distinguished from his practical procedure. As a philosopher he was engaged in the struggle for survival in a den of philosophers, many of them sceptics.

⁶⁶ The word *νοῦς* seems to have been shunned by Epicurus because of its Anaxagorean and Platonic connotations; a dozen examples of *διάνοια* are found in the sixty-eight pages of his extant works. A grant from the American Council of Learned Societies has enabled the writer to prepare an index.

⁶⁷ *Rat. Sent.* 24, end.

⁶⁸ Usener, *op. cit.*, frag. 247, p. 181.6–15.

Before them he maintained the doctrine that all sensations are true in the sense of real. In practice his attitude was thoroughly pragmatic, like that of the modern scientist. He looked upon sensations as possessing an infinite range of validity.

In conclusion I venture to collate certain representative statements of modern scholars which seem to me unwarranted amplifications of the principle that "all sensations are true." Zeller was a prime offender: ⁶⁹ "we must allow that sensation as such is always, and must under all circumstances, be trusted." He was followed by Masson: ⁷⁰ "all sensations are reliable." Both are refuted by the trite Epicurean example of the oar in the water; the sensation is true but it is not trustworthy. Zeller also wrote: ⁷¹ "if all sensations as such are true, the saying of Protagoras necessarily follows that for each individual that is true which seems to him to be true." This is refuted by the fact that Epicurus urged his disciples to check their own observations by those of others.⁷² Hicks, who adheres closely to Zeller, wrote: ⁷³ "the senses cannot be deceived." Yet many of our sensations are worthless on account of distances. Bailey goes farther than his predecessors: ⁷⁴ "It may indeed be said without exaggeration that Epicurean physics and ethics are but the elaboration in many fields of the supreme principle of the infallibility of sensation." This is overexaggeration. Epicurus has left us epitomes of his physics and ethics, which he required his disciples to memorize, but never once in them did he think it worth while to mention that "all sensations are true."

⁶⁹ *The Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics* (London, 1880) 426.

⁷⁰ *Op. cit.* 132. See note 1.

⁷¹ *Op. cit.* 431. See note 71.

⁷² See note 49.

⁷³ See note 38.

⁷⁴ *Op. cit.* 274. See note 60.