

Senses

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Abstract

Sense or *aesthesis* directs information to the mind and soul, and vision has a remarkable participation.

1 Primary sense

Αἰσθησις [Gk] or ‘aesthesis’, as well as *sensus*, its Latin counterpart, are primarily associated with organoleptic perception — that is, receiving information from our own body or the physical environment through special organs (‘sensors’) such as the eyes, ears, nose, and the skin.

The mode of entry of the information can be debated between (a) the active way to ‘perceive’ (*percipere* [L], from *per-* [L], entirely + *capere* [L], to take) and (b) the passive way to ‘receive’ (*recipere* [L], from *re-* [L], back + *capere* [L], to take).

SOURCE	MEANING	DERIVATIVES
αἰσθησις [Gk]	sense	aesthetics, kinæsthesia
<i>sensus</i> [L]	feeling, sense	sense, sensual
<i>sentire</i> [L]	perceive, feel, experience; think, realise, see, understand	sentiment; consent
<i>percipere</i> [L]	secure, gain; perceive, learn, feel	perception
<i>recipere</i> [L]	accept, take in, take back	reception

TABLE 1 Senses

Although each sensory input has a specific name associated to an organ, the general *sentire* [L] is often used occasionally or permanently in substitution of specific senses such as hearing (which would normally be *audire*) or olfaction (through a transformation to ‘scent’ [En]).

2 Extrasensory experience

Both the Greek and Latin versions of ‘sense’ often go beyond organoleptic functions. For instance, when we can ‘sense tension in the room’, this is clearly in the realm of feelings, or the *psyche* (ψυχή [Gk], soul).

A special use of *aesthesis*, taken to an advanced state of abstraction, and perhaps tending to perfection, gives rise to ‘aesthetics’ that represents the ‘sense of beauty’ in the arts and/ or philosophical realm.

The Latin branch, *sense*, has a notable appeal to the mind, representing ‘logic’. For instance, ‘there is some sense in that’, or ‘nonsense’; also, very popular in the dictionaries, ‘sense’ stands for alternative interpretations or meanings.

3 Visual dominance

Although most of the senses can be substituted by the general *sentire* [L], vision has a special importance so it always stands on its own. Since we must ‘see this to believe’ how important vision is, let us consider a number of expressions that involve the sense of vision as a reference through a variety of root words.

SOURCE	MEANING	DERIVATIVES
θέα [Gk]	view, perspective	theory
θεωρός [Gk]	spectator	theory
δεικνύω [Gk]	show, indicate	παράδειγμα [Gk], απόδειξη [Gk] (proof)
<i>spectare</i> [L]	observe, watch, look at, see	spectator, prospect, perspective
<i>illustrare</i> [L]	illuminate, light up, elucidate	illustration
<i>praestigium</i> [L]	illusion, tricks	prestige

TABLE 2 Vision variants

3.1 Vantage theory

Looking from a distance gives an advantageous (i.e. from a ‘vantage point’ at the ‘front row’ — from *ab* [L], from + *ante* [L], before) panorama (i.e. ‘full view’) that contains all relevant information, albeit not in detail. This is the value of *theory* [Gk] — Table 2.

3.2 Illustrative examples

For a closer and more ‘hands-on’ experience, we must ask for an example — or a *paradigm* [Gk] (Table 2) which puts things side by side (παρά- [Gk]) for an illustrative (from *lux* [L], light) demonstration that should remove all doubt.

3.3 Adjustable perspectives

When looking from a certain point of view, we have an associated perspective (from *per* [L], through + *specere* [L], to look) — that is, a way of looking at something. Technically, this includes the medium through which we see, such as a glass or a lens. It is to be expected that moving to another point of view, or the medium through which we look, we will have another perspective and thus see different things.

3.4 Looking outwards and forward

There is an old joke (before cars becoming popular) about Denmark being so flat, that people could see from their window who was coming to visit them in the evening — that is, they could see their *prospective* (from *pro-* [L], forward + *specere* [L], to look) visitors walking. Thus, people know what or whom to ‘expect’ (from *ex-* [L], out + *specere* [L], to look), so they could prepare appropriately.

3.5 Optical illusions: prestige, glamour, and allure

People are impressed by what they see, but many times they can become victims of illusions. ‘Prestige’, for instance, is exactly the case in point: while the word of choice for ‘influence’ or ‘high standing’, *praestigium* [L] means ‘illusion’, ‘trick’, and other kinds of magic.

Another disappointment is when the issuing authority of a ‘solid reference’ has itself dubious origins. For instance, the impressive and attractive ‘glamour’ is merely an alteration of the word ‘grammar’: something admired because it is scholarly, and thus high-standing.

Yet another optical illusion, ‘allure’ (that is, being powerfully attractive or fascinating) has ‘tricky’ origins, deriving from *ad-* [L], to + *luere* [F], to lure — originally a falconry term ([Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010](#)).

Documentation

Aversa, A., and W. Whitaker (2008) *WORDS Latin Dictionary* — GPL

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