

Episode Fifty-One - The Workings of Images

Post by "Cassius" of January 6, 2021 at 12:54 AM

I suspect what we're talking about here is going to clarify as we proceed to talk about more details in the rest of the poem, so I'll just keep an open mind and we'll see where the discussion goes.

[Quote from Elayne](#)

He apparently didn't conceive of human imagination being a process which does not actually require something entering the brain from the outside,

I think this comment indicates what we can look at as we proceed to clarify things. But already I would say I would not approach it from the "didn't conceive" perspective because it seems more likely to me that he certainly would have entertained that possibility (for example is it not inherent in Plato's theory of "remembering"?) I would think it's more likely that what we're dealing with is something more along the lines of the statement to the effect that "The gods would have had no pattern either" as one of his arguments as to why the universe is not supernaturally created. He did seem to stress that we have to have experiences / stimuli in order to get our minds working in the first place.

Possibly he is making the very broad point that even imagination is ultimately the mind recombining past experiences in different ways so that in effect it is true that everything going on in our minds is our processing and recombining of past observations / stimulations that we've received since birth, mixed with anything that is innate.

I think here in this too about Cicero's comment to Cassius Longinus joking/ridiculing that maybe he was thinking about Cassius because his spectre floated into his mind.... Whatever is going on here Epicurus must have been understood to have emphasized the importance of outside stimuli in a way that we are finding counterintuitive -- or maybe this is another example of him looking at things in ways so different than we are conditioned to do that we don't fully recognize what he was saying.

No doubt we're going to conclude that significant aspects of what he was saying were "wrong" according to our current knowledge, but I'd also bet that if we consider broadly the point that he was making it's likely we're going to find that he had good reasons for his positions.

I have never been one to accept explanations of Epicurus' views simply because they are "convenient" to other parts of his theories, but I do think in this case we have a very convenient use for the discussions involved in the Centaur issue. It is probably helpful - and even probably true - that people can get very strongly convinced that they see or hear certain things that

others can't validate - and in fact in most cases they can't themselves validate by future observations. So long as we insist firmly that ultimately things MUST be validated by ongoing observations that are "verifiable," then it's probably helpful in many ways to be open to the possibility that "the light plays tricks on us" or that phenomena such as the illusions we are about to discuss in the rest of book 4 can in fact appear to us to be something real when in fact it is not.

There are many aspects of religion and views of the gods that I think Epicurus would be loathe to accommodate or "humor," but there are also the kind of innocent and naive assertions that some people make that they "saw something" that might be explainable to them by explaining the effects and possibilities of "images" - and without stretching the truth as to what "can" happen. It would probably be easy to analogize the tricks our eyes play on us in things like the mirages of pools of water in the desert, and I doubt it would be far off to describe that as an interplay of images "flying through the air" in ways we don't expect. If I remember correctly we'll have a lot more occasion to entertain the possibility of using images to explain false views of the gods and the rise of religion in the material upcoming in book 5.

I think this will clarify as we proceed and I'm perfectly prepared to think that it may be my own views that change more than others' here. Although I've read and listened to these sections numbers of times in the past this is really the first time I've discussed it in the level of detail that we are doing now, so I am sure I'll have much to revise as we go forward.