

# Episode Sixty - Dreams and the Mind's Use of Images

Post by "Cassius" of March 1, 2021 at 6:09 AM

I think it would be helpful to post here some of the passages from DeWitt where these issues are discussed:

## SOUL, SENSATION, AND MIND

conviction of reality because the memory and the volitional mind, which is rational, are quiescent. Thus the deceitfulness of dreams is an error of the same kind as that of the automatic mind that judges the square tower to be round. The waking mind, in command of the total experience, knows that no such things as centaurs exist.

Even this is not the whole story. The mind is capable of functioning as a supersense even in the hours of waking. It loses this capacity if the being is in a turmoil through fears and anxieties. Thus Lucretius warns Memmius that, unless free from such fears "you will never be able to capture with unruffled peace of mind the idols that from the blessed bodies of the gods float into the minds of men."<sup>82</sup> These idols belong in that isolated, vagrant class of **images**, which, not being part of a pressing stream, are imperceptible to fleshly sensation and register themselves only upon the mind and only under restricted conditions.

The caution must be observed, however, that visions of the mind do not enjoy the status of criteria of truth. They do possess value but only at the level of circumstantial evidence; they afford reason for believing, by way of example, that the bodies of the gods are anthropomorphic.

## MOTOR IMPULSES

It was likewise necessary that Epicurus should furnish an account of bodily movement in harmony with his materialistic principles. For information we are again dependent upon Lucretius, because this topic was omitted from the Little Epitome as being unessential for beginning students. It has already been mentioned that all the phenomena of consciousness, or as Epicurus puts it, the capacities "without which we die," were appraised to be accidents, that is, contingent upon the coexistence of soul and body. It might then have been thought that volition, being one of these contingent capacities, should have ranked as an adequate cause for the inception of all bodily movements.

Such was not the case. Even for an act of walking an external cause must be found. Before the human being makes the decision to walk, his mind must receive a stimulus from the impact of **images** of himself in the act of walking. *Ipse volens it*, "from this stimulus results the will to walk," if the translation may be expanded to bring out its implication.<sup>83</sup> Incidentally, readers will recognize in this theory a precise anticipation of gestalt psychology.

This explanation, if there were no more to it, might win for itself a certain admission as a smart invention. To accept the rest of it is very difficult. It is not unacceptable to be told that the impulse which has been started in the mind, though not by the mind, communicates itself to the rest of the soul, disposed over the whole body, but when we read that movement comes about through the dilation of all the minute channels of the body, allowing the circulation of surges of air to all parts, this is too fantastic to seem reasonable. Neither does the comparison with the winds driving ships or derricks lifting huge stones result in a verdict of plausibility. The theory may well conform, however, the truth of the tradition that Epicurus believed the earth to be

Quote

## MIND AS A SUPERSENSE

It is part of the psychology of Epicurus that the mind under certain conditions is capable of functioning as an organ of sense; thus the procedure of Lucretius is quite regular in discussing the topic immediately after sensation. The exposition presumes certain subsidiary ideas, such as the gradations of atoms, the irrational nature of sensation, the faculty psychology, and a phenomenon of double reactions.

The gradation of atoms is basic to the account of sensation. The conformations that cause vision, for instance, while finer and more mobile than those of odors, are not sinuous enough to penetrate walls, as sounds do. Vision, moreover, is subject to another limitation: unless the idols be discharged from an object in plain view and so constitute a steady stream, no sufficient pressure on the eyes results and no sensation registers itself. Of the random and vagrant idols only the mind can take cognizance because of the extreme mobility of its component atoms and the resulting supersensitivity.

In order to discern the circumstances under which this takes place the principle must be invoked that sensation is irrational. It merely delivers a stimulus and this may fail of registering itself. It is possible to hear without listening and to see without observing.

Down to this point there is nothing peculiar in the thought of Epicurus. The rest of the teaching is his own. He thinks of the mind as a mechanism for processing sensations. Its activity may be automatic or volitional. The automatic mind, though normally dependable, is capable of erring; it may report the square tower to be round. To guard against such errors and to correct them when once made is the function of the volitional mind, directed by reason. Unlike the automatic mind, it pays attention to all sensations and corrects the false by calling the true to witness.

In dreamful sleep, according to Epicurus, the erring, automatic mind alone is active. Bodily sensation, memory and volition are all quiescent. Under these circumstances the stage is cleared for the entrance of all the random, floating idols that survive from the swift, coherent streams that under waking conditions press upon the organs of sense and register themselves as sensations. Of these errant, subsensory idols the passive mind, partly because of its relief from interference and control, and partly because of the supermobility and supersensitivity of its component atoms, alone is capable of taking cognizance. Thus it functions as a supersense.

To complete this exposition a subsidiary doctrine of the two reactions must be invoked. Let it be assumed that the image of a centaur presents itself to the dreamer; it may even be a galloping centaur. This acts as a stimulus to the mind and causes a reaction, *kinesis*. This is not the end, however, because a second reaction follows and the automatic mind registers a recognition: "It is a centaur." The dream carries the conviction of reality because the memory and the volitional mind, which is rational, are quiescent. Thus the deceitfulness of dreams is an error of the same kind as that of the automatic mind that judges the square tower to be round. The waking mind, in command of the total experience, knows that no such things as centaurs exist.

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## Quote

### MIND

It is now possible to summarize the psychology of Epicurus and to describe with more precision and detail his teaching concerning the mind and its activities.

The human being consists of body and soul, both alike corporeal by nature. The two are born at the same time and grow and decline in pace with one another. They are coterminous and cosensitive. They function as a unit and reactions are psychosomatic.

The soul consists of atoms surpassing others in fineness, smoothness, and sphericity and consequently in mobility. All the component atoms are in contact throughout the body, unless in the condition of sleep, when the contiguity is broken, part of the soul escaping from the containing body, part retreating deep within. In daydreaming -a less extensive but similar condition arises. Among the component atoms gradations of mobility exist, the less mobile being at the periphery and associated with the operations of sense, which are all varieties of touch. The most mobile of the component atoms constitute the rational part of the soul and are situated deep within the breast. This location is no less fixed than that of the ears or eyes, because the mind is an organ of the being no less than they.

Although it is usual to speak of this part of the soul as rational, the adjective is inadequate. The so-called rational part could with equal justice be called the emotional part, because fears and joys, according to Epicurus, have their seat in the same place. <sup>57</sup> In this instance the Latin language is for once superior to Greek in respect of terminology. The word *mens* is capable of denoting both mental and emotional aspects of the mind's activity, while *animus* can be equated with Greek *dianoia*, "intellect," and *anima* may be used as equivalent to *psyche*, "soul," including all capacities, rational, emotional, and sensory.

The activity of the rational part, *dianoia, animus*, is either voluntary or involuntary, that is, either automatic or volitional. The character of the automatic mind that most impressed Epicurus was its speed. Its function is to receive and process sensations and under normal conditions this is done instantaneously: to cite trite examples, the individual is unerringly warned of ditches and precipices and other dangers in his path. It is this automatic mind that takes care of man in his daily rounds on the physical or somatic level of life.

The Sensations are irrational and merely register a stimulus, *kinesis*. It is the quick and automatic mind that with the aid of memory registers a recognition and says, "This is honey." It is likewise the mind that makes the generalization "Honey is sweet." These are "fantastic perceptions of the intelligence." They do not possess the rank of criteria because they are not a direct contact between mind and matter but are rather the result of a process or operation. "Fantastic" means "immediate."<sup>55</sup>

Under the abnormal conditions of either genuine dreaming or daydreaming the supersensitive mind is capable of operating as a sense, registering the incidence of those vagrant idols which, being detached from visual streams, are incapable of exerting pressure and stimulating the senses of the flesh. These visions, however, do not rank as criteria, being subject to no correction by the conscious, rational mind.

Even under normal conditions, however, the automatic mind is liable to err. This error often consists in adding to and subtracting from the data of sense. For instance, to the observer the moon may seem to be moving and the drifting clouds to be standing still; or the shore may seem to be moving and the passing ship to be stationary; or the anchored ship may seem to the passenger to be moving and the passing ship to be motionless. In all of these examples the error is not in sensation but in the automatic mind, which adds motion to standing objects and subtracts it from moving objects. Epicurus calls this error "the addition of opinion," but the fact that it also includes subtraction is recognized by the statement that sensation "is neither stimulated by itself nor, when stimulated by an external object, is it capable of adding or subtracting anything."<sup>59</sup> In such instances Epicurus is at pains to point out that the reaction caused by sensation is followed by a second reaction within the observer "which is connected with 'the fantastic perception' but distinct from it."<sup>60</sup> This second, involuntary reaction is the source of error.

It is another shortcoming of the automatic mind that its operations confine themselves to the sensations of the moment. It must consequently be subjected to correction by the volitional mind, which is truly rational. The latter is aware of the danger of error; it remembers that the value of sensations depends upon distances; it recollects past sensations; it takes cognizance of all sensations and it appeals to the observations of others.<sup>61</sup>

Unlike the automatic mind that warns the observer of ditches and precipices, the volitional mind takes cognizance of the Anticipations, that is, the innate ideas of justice, of the divine nature, and other such abstractions, and it puts to the test every law of the land to determine whether it harmonizes with the innate idea of justice. The volitional mind also takes cognizance of the Feelings, that is, those fears and anxieties which warn the individual of the false opinions concerning things of supreme importance, the causes of the worst turmoil in the soul.

The status of the volitional mind, which alone is truly rational, is that of a judge presiding in court. The litigants are truth and error. The role of the Sensations, Anticipations, and Feelings is that of witnesses. The judge, as becomes his office, rejects no evidence that is pertinent; he distinguishes between mere opinion and knowledge, between the idea that awaits confirmation by additional evidence and that which is already certain, between the immediate, dependable sensation and the deceptive, distant view, between false pleasures and wholesome pleasures and between true and false concepts of abstract truth. If the mind falls short of performing these judicial functions, the conflict in the soul will be prolonged and no satisfying decision between truth and error will be attainable. This is the gist of Authorized Doctrine 24.

The point that bears the stress in the above exposition is the danger of indecision, which is even more destructive of happiness than false opinion. For example, it is worse to suspect the truth of the tales about Acheron than to believe in them.<sup>62</sup> Again, the sole reason for acquiring knowledge of celestial phenomena is "serenity of mind and an unshakable faith."<sup>63</sup> The lack of faith, *apistia*, is of the same effect as indecision, *akrisia*. Both spell turmoil.

This equivalence of indecision with lack of faith is made clear in two sayings. The first is Doctrine 22: "We must take into our reckoning the established telos [pleasure] and all the manifest evidence, to which we refer the opinions we form. If we fail to do so, our whole life will be filled with indecision and turmoil." The second dictum is Vatican Saying 57: "His whole life will be thrown into confusion through lack of faith and will be wrecked." Epicurus was in the process of discovering the part played by faith in the happy life. In so doing he was preparing popular thought for the acceptance of the New Testament, where faith at last attained to full stature as a virtue. The difference between faith as it first emerged and the perfected faith resides in the fact that the former was faith in the truth of doctrine while the latter was faith in Jesus Christ as a redeemer.

With the idea of mind as a judicial faculty Epicurus anticipated the practical reason of modern philosophy; in the Platonic vocabulary it was *phronesis*. Describing it by paraphrase in his usual way, he called it "sober calculation" and assigned to it the function "of investigating the reasons for every choice and avoidance and of expelling

false opinions, the chief cause of the turbulence that takes possession of the souls of men." It was to him the starting point for all the virtues and for this reason more precious than philosophy, by which he meant what is now called pure reason, and when he says "it teaches the impossibility of living happily without living according to reason, honor and justice,"<sup>M</sup> he means that geometry was incapable of imparting this lesson. It is true that geometry is not mentioned, but by implication the Platonic program of education, based upon mathematics, is being repudiated.

As an essential precaution it deserves to be emphasized that this concept of the rational mind as a judge, soberly weighing the evidence contributed by the Sensations, Anticipations, and Feelings, which perform the office of witnesses, constitutes a frame of reference without which the teachings of Epicurus are bound to be misapprehended. This frame, moreover, is incomplete without the Twelve Elementary Principles, which are, as it were, a sort of legal code, in harmony with which the judging mind must reach its decisions.

That these Twelve Principles were the starting point for the Epicurean program of education is unmistakable whether from the Little Epitome or Lucretius. The truth of them was not demonstrated inductively from sensation but established deductively and only confirmed by sensation. If this involves a logical fallacy or a philosophical defect, it must be borne in mind that Epicurus was not constructing a theory of knowledge but a philosophy that would serve as a road to happiness. This called for a set of principles, a judging mind, and dependable witnesses, all of which his system furnished.

It was his view that only notions accessory or inferential to the Twelve Principles, such as the nature of the soul, had their origin in sensations. If this is a fallacy or a defect, it should be borne in mind that he was not working out a psychology but merely showing how his system based upon principles, the practical reason, and evidence was intended to operate. The notion of consciousness, as employed in modern psychology, lay outside of his problem and so he had no need to deal with the content of consciousness.

It should nevertheless be remembered that a misunderstanding of his teaching gave rise to Gassendi's doctrine "that there is nothing in the intellect which has not been in the senses" and that this in turn was a starting point for John Locke and modern empiricism. Epicurus was not himself an empiricist but rather an intuitionist: the mind of the infant was to his thinking not a blank tablet but already laced with the faint outlines of ideas that should gradually acquire definition in pace with experience, instruction, and reflection.

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After reading all this, considering what is said in the podcast, and combining it all together, I am thinking that among many other implications it is much easier to see the role of images of the divine playing an important part in Epicurus' thinking:

The fact that knowledge of the gods lay beyond the range of sensation might well have been taken for granted, but it happens to be one of the points upon which, in the judgment of Lucretius, the rank and file of disciples should be explicitly informed: "Subtle is the nature of the gods, far removed from the perception of our senses, and only with difficulty is it seen by the part of the soul that is called mind." This is consistent with the atheism to the first Authorial Doctrine, which mentions the gods as "discernible by reason," and the same truth is expressly repeated by Cicero, who wrote of them as perceived "not by sensation but by the mind."<sup>18</sup>

The mind, however, functions in two ways, first as a representative organ of vision, and second, as the organ of reason. As a representative organ it is capable of perceiving the subtle images of the gods, whether in sleep or in waking hours, which are too fine to be caught by the physical eyes. The information so acquired possesses authority because it emanates from Nature and is a universal experience. "For what other shape," Cicero's interlocutor asks, "ever presents itself to anyone, either sleeping or awake?"<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, this information falls short of finality; it is a hint only. Lucretius is writing with precision when he speaks of the images of the gods which float into the minds of the pious as "harbingers of the form divine."<sup>20</sup> He means that they afford only a hint of the form of the gods.

Along with the question of form goes that of the size of the gods. As on the question of polytheism, the teaching of Epicurus was in harmony with tradition, because even the statues of the gods were made larger than human. Ancient authority, as anonymous papyrus, employs the words "even their forms tending to the sublime."<sup>21</sup> Sextus Empiricus lays emphasis upon the size of the images that visit men in sleep, and St. Augustine not only declares that, according to Epicurus, the stimulus

#### THE TRUE PIETY

looking on.<sup>22</sup> This makes of the dead Epicurus a living criterion of conduct, and it may well be that it was Epicureanism which gave vogue to a novel concept of immortality which was current in antiquity, an immortality of good influence as the prolongation of a good life. As Virgil put it, "To perpetuate our names by our deeds, this is the task of virtue."<sup>23</sup>

Quite in line with this veneration toward Epicurus is the Epicurean attitude toward the gods. They are incapable of anger and so need not be feared, but they are not incapable of loving; "they are partial toward those like themselves"; they are "friends of the wise." There is a psychological nexus between man and them, because the concept of the Mindful and incorruptible being is implanted in the mind by Nature herself. Moreover, the **images** of the gods come down to visit the minds of the pious and are recognized by them. To desire to aspire to a perfect happiness such as theirs is natural for men and this goal is attainable. Lucretius is very positive upon the latter point: "This I seem able in these matters to affirm, that so very paltry are the traces of their evil natures which reason cannot expel for the wise that nothing prevents them from passing a life worthy of the gods."<sup>24</sup> Epicurus himself wrote to the bad Metrodorus: "Meditate, therefore, upon those truths and upon others like them by day and by night, both by yourself and with someone like yourself and never will you be troubled whether waking or sleeping but will live like a god among men, for in no respect does a man who lives among immortal blessings resemble a mortal creature."<sup>25</sup> The Christian said, "We shall be like Him." The Epicurean would have said, "We can be like them here and now."