

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

Post by "Cassius" of March 2, 2021 at 9:01 PM

Quote

{Norman Dewitt)

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.

Quote

[15.19] **Cassius to Cicero**

[Brundisium, latter half of January, 45 B.C.]

L I hope that you are well. I assure you that on this tour of mine there is nothing that gives me more pleasure to do than to write to you; for I seem to be talking and joking with you face to face. And yet that does not come to pass because of those spectres; and, by way of retaliation for that, in my next letter I shall let loose upon you such a rabble of Stoic boors that you will proclaim Catus a true-born Athenian.

2 I am glad that our friend Pansa was sped on his way by universal goodwill when he left the city in military uniform, and that not only on my own account, but also, most assuredly, on that of all our friends.

Well at this point it appears that only Cassius the First, Cassius the Second, and Norman DeWitt seem to see a role for "memory" separate and distinct from what is being described here in the function of the mind receiving images directly. I am still at the moment of the opinion that the extension of this function from (A) a description of what I see as primarily significant for a relatively narrow set of examples of the mind receiving images directly in dreams and/or of the gods (which apparently I am also in a minority in thinking plausible) to (B) constituting Epicurus' complete description of the operation of all of human memory, is something that is so dramatic that - if true - would have been documented extensively by every ancient and subsequent critic

of Epicurus who ever lived, not just in the private joking of Cicero and Cassius! 😊

So for the time being I'm not sure whether DeWitt is correct in referring to a distinction in automatic/volitional operations of the mind, or whether there is some other logical division, but I can't see this being a description of something as crucial as all of human memory. But that's why we talk together and compare notes, because it's all too easy to make mistakes and the best way forward is comparing observations with others who are on the same path!

Note: This was also in Episode 58: "Nor from any other reason is the mind awake when the body is asleep, but because those very images affect the mind which were used to move the sense when we were awake, so that we fully believe we see a person who has been long since dead and buried in the grave; and it cannot well be otherwise, because all the senses of the body are obstructed and bound up by sleep, and therefore have no power to convince us of the contrary. Besides, the memory is feeble and languishes by rest, and makes no objection to satisfy us, that the man has been long in the arms of death, whom the mind really believes it sees alive."

I do agree that there is probably more to this than just the issue of the gods, but I don't think we have a good grasp on the role of memory, or on how the mind is using past images to store up something that it uses in the present. In other words, I am not convinced that he is not saying that these images (such as the image of walking) are not stored and then summoned from within, rather than having to be picked out of an apparently infinite number of images floating in the air currently. Perhaps there is some combination involved, but I am thinking that there's got to be an image storage system involved as well.

And I think a significant part of the difference in where we are at the moment may be in the question of what it is that the mind is storing, because I think it is more likely that Epicurus considered most of what is stored in the mind to be some kind of "pictures" or "images" and I don't think we're all on the same page on that.

Much more for me to think about (and to think about the process of thinking and memory)!