

"Setting Before the Eyes"

Post by "Cassius" of February 3, 2022 at 8:21 AM

Duh. I should have brought this question up earlier too (I hope i didn't and have forgotten)!

What would be the relationship, if any, between this discussion and the flow of "images" that is discussed extensively in Book 4 of Lucretius?

I gather from our discussion of book 4 (which I think took place before your arrival in the podcast Don) that Epicurus was suggesting that many of our thought processes derive from our minds selectively receiving some from among many of the "images" that are constantly floating in the air. This is specifically suggested too by Cicero in his correspondence to Cassius Longinus and in Cassius' subsequent reference to "spectres."

To what extent would an idea of "setting before the eyes" be related to selectively tuning your attention to certain images as part of the thought process.

One of the reasons the images discussions seem to be largely ignored by modern commentators is that Epicurus seems to have been suggesting that these images were intimately involved in our thoughts, which we tend to reject today. I can't imagine that Philodemus departed too far from Epicurus on that, so is it possible that the Epicurean view of images is related to issues involving setting before the eyes?

10.2*****Letter from Cicero to Cassius, written from Rome, January of 45 B.C.

DXXX \(\F XV, 16\)

TO C. CASSIUS LONGINUS \(\AT BRUNDISIUM\)

ROME \(\JANUARY\)

I think you must be a little ashamed at this being the third letter inflicted on you before I have a page or a syllable from you. But I will not press you: I shall expect, or rather exact, a longer letter. For my part, if I had a messenger always at hand, I should write even three an hour. For somehow it makes you seem almost present when I write anything to you, and that not "by way of phantoms of images," as your new friends express it, who hold that "mental pictures" are caused by what Catus called "spectres" - or I must remind you that Catus Insuber the Epicurean, lately dead, calls "spectres" what the famous Gargettius, and before him Democritus, used to call "images."

Well, even if my eyes were capable of being struck by these “spectres,” because they spontaneously run in upon them at your will, I do not see how the mind can be struck. You will be obliged to explain it to me, when you return safe and sound, whether the “spectre” of you is at my command, so as to occur to me as soon as I have taken the fancy to think about you; and not only about you, who are in my heart’s core, but supposing I begin thinking about the island of Britain – will its image fly at once into my mind? But of this later on.

I am just sounding you now to see how you take it. For if you are angry and annoyed, I shall say more and demand that you be restored to the sect from which you have been ejected by “violence and armed force.” In an injunction of this sort the words “within this year” are not usually added. Therefore, even if it is now two or three years since you divorced Virtue, seduced by the charms of Pleasure, it will still be open for me to do so. And yet to whom am I speaking? It is to you, the most gallant of men, who ever since you entered public life have done nothing that was not imbued to the utmost with the highest principle. In that very sect of yours I have a misgiving that there must be more stuff than I thought, if only because you accept it. “How did that come into your head?” you will say. Because I had nothing else to say. About politics I can write nothing: for I don’t choose to write down my real opinions.

**10.3*****Letter from Cassius to Cicero, written from Brundisium, January, 45 B.C.**

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.