

Prolepsis Citations from Long & Sedley

Post by "Eikadistes" of July 3, 2024 at 3:35 AM

I am struck by the variety of ways in which *prolēpseis* is employed:

Sometimes, *prolēpseis* seems to be used within the domain of memory, as *mental impressions* or *representations* that have been formed from personal experience, sort of like mnemonic scars; sometimes, we express *prolēpseis* as a function of linguistics, as a necessary condition for communication, as a *common idea* to which a word refers, like how two people with different forms of colorblindness can both share the common idea of a "rainbow", or the fact that people who have lost their ability to detect sounds can still hear their favorite songs in their head. Othertimes, we refer to *prolēpseis* as a feature of developmental psychology, where it acts as an intellectual category required for children to develop pattern recognition. Elsewhere, *prolēpseis* exists within the domain of dreams, as *mental apprehensions*, uncensored from the editor that is the ego.

It seems clear why there are various "camps" in terms of "interpretations" of Epicurean theology: the criterion of *prolēpseis*, itself, has so many applications: Is the concept of "god" more like "divinity" or "blessedness" (or "justice"), as in, a prototype against which new examples can be judged? As in Star Trek V, where the crew meets a supreme being, but ultimately decides that this being cannot be God because it is willing to inflict pain? Or is the concept of "god" more like "human" or "living being" (or "animal") as in, a sort of "who" or "it" that a human infant could observe and (as pre-verbal infants do) point at with their chubby digits to indicate "**That! There! It!**" Is there a period in the development of young children prior to receiving their conception of "god"? Or is it conditioned by the very genetics that deal the cards of our neurology?

Here again, I really, **REALLY** want to consider that Epicurus would have mentioned, **at least once** (*humor me here*), that he, himself must have, as a conservative practitioner of Eleusian and Dionysian rituals (which, again, he, himself, seems to have attended with enthusiasm) ingested chemicals that were intended to induce an altered state of consciousness, a state that people throughout millennia have recognized as being exceptionally noteworthy and positively transformation. So, it is ultimately geared toward improving the circumstances of one's life. The experience of certain, psycho-active chemicals can reliably reproduce "the experience of God" when administered to Christians in laboratory conditions (among other faiths). Epicurus and his associates would have been aware that intoxicants were capable of inducing dreams that host godlike characters and fill participants with an overwhelmingly, undeniable sense of bliss.

I would be very surprised if Epicurus did not "see" Zeus at least once during his rituals.

I would be even **more** surprised if Epicurus (*purposefully*, it would have to seem) omitted any mention of the private, mental experiences people experience after ingesting entheogens in his writings. It would seem strange for a person in that context to **not** draw a connection between intoxication, good dreams, the feeling of bliss, the rituals of religion, and discussion about theology. Epicurus seems to have thought that pre-civilized humans developed conceptions about "the gods" (including, I have to assume, a being that would later be called "Zeus") in their dreams, independent of each other. They then developed spoken words they could share with one another to refer back to "that-memorably-strange-recurring-Zeus-experience". After time, they realized that "memory of the Zeus-experience" made them more observant of their own behavior. So, life improved.

As someone who writes every dream I have, and every dream I can recall (and have continued to do so for over 15 years), and as being that same someone who has experimented with psychedelics, may I just say that psychedelics are a **much** more reliable way to experience anything remotely "religious". Most of my (and probably your) dreams are anywhere from mundane to bizarre to incoherent, whereas your average trip is always memorable and meaningful.

Ultimately, I think what I'm getting at is that a *prolépsis* needs a stimulus. So what was the stimulus? The *prolépsis* of "the gods" must have been stimulated by a powerful agent capable of inducing an exceptional, purely-mental experience, significant enough to re-direct the trajectory of a person's life. So what are our candidates for the stimulation of spirituality? Religious institutions are one, and their forms of indoctrination are powerful, but they aren't always reliable at inducing profound mental experiences. (A lot of religious people just show up at church like they would show up at work or school, as purely a social obligation.) Dreams are another, and can be memorable and inspirational, but, as mentioned, usually just recycle mundane, daily experiences; dreams are only as reliable as showing the image of gods as they are showing the image of unreal monsters. But certain psychedelics are powerful, reliable, and psychologically transformational; "pre-civilized" humans who foraged for food were not choosers (they were opportunistic), so when it came to diet, mushrooms were/are nutritious, ubiquitous, visually-arresting...

I guess what I mean to say is this: we were *tripping* before we were assigning words to objects, so by the time we developed spoken/written language, the "weird-experience-after-eating-mushrooms" (or walking past a volcanic vent, or eating fermented fruit, or walking past a forest of burning cannabis plants, or eating alkaline barks, or consuming ergot that would have grown on stored grains, or..., etc.) demanded a word to go along with it, and I think that the words we use, like "god", "divine", and "blessed", are in the same spectrum as the words Epicurus meant when he referred to ancient peoples' dreams. I suppose, also ... perhaps, some of the discussion we have about Epicurean theology is taking place in a bubble of the English, Spanish, German, Italian, and Greek-speaking scholarship from societies that are propagandistic and prohibitory against chemicals that would have been exposed to the human ecosystem for hundreds of thousands of years. To be frank, I think we all overlook the influence the drugs had on early religion (the *real* kind).

Might have gone off topic there. Thanks for the share, [Don](#)!