

My notes - Tsouna's Prolepsis Essay

Post by "Hiram" of April 4, 2017 at 12:32 PM

I decided to gather all my notes re: the prolepsis article in order to help others studying this source. (Edit: The Tsouna article is downloadable [here.](#))

prolepsis - prenotion or anticipation is a passive process by which the mind recalls an impression from the senses; prolepseis are "enargeis" or self-evident just like the sense impressions, although there is room for debate on "the question of where they derive their self-evident character from". Tsouna names two interpretations of prolepsis:

1. the "Lockean" view - aesthesis (they derive their self-evident character from the senses, which initiate these anticipations). Tsouna subscribes to this view. She says prolepsis is a passive mental process and self-evident by virtue of being initially sense-derived. This view is consistent with the requirement that there be no opinions in the canon.
2. the "Kantian" view - they derive their self-evident character supposedly from the unmediated spontaneity of association. Morel (and Goldschmidt) defends the Kantian view.

In the past we've used the term PRE-COGNITIVE to describe prolepsis, but the sources use ALOGOI, which means NON-RATIONAL, and this is the closest thing to our assertion that there is no interpretation, no opinion (p. 168, paragraph that starts "Recall ...")

She also says that prolepsis was an empiricist answer to MENO'S PARADOX. Not sure what this is but the source cited is DL 10.33 (Diogenes Laertius)

Ts. says that (some?) Epicureans argued that "all reason derives from the senses" ?

p. 170 what we have prolepsis of: animals, natural things; abstractions like justice, truth, utility; responsibility and agency (psychological things); atoms, gods (non-perceptibles)

p. 171 some things are per se (atoms and void), others exist as attributes, of which some are inseparable, permanent or fixed attributes, and others temporary or contingent (accidents) ****
Prolepsis is only of the inseparable attributes. This is the closest thing to "essences" in materialism.

Part 3. Gods

the only "innate" prolepsis, according to Tsouna, is of the gods, which seems to me like an awkward accommodation. The source for gods' innateness is Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* (ND).

p 174 idealists think the [Epicurean gods](#) are moral ideals constructed by the mind; realists think the gods are real and have ethical significance

Epicurus says there's clear knowledge (enarges gnosis) of the gods, however

p 176 my problems with gods as prolepsis. a. There is NO universal concept of the gods as blessed, or as existing. A huge proportion of the populations does not believe in gods or a god, and a huge proportion imagines god as mad, wrathful or evil; also as suffering (the Catholic god), or as a warlord (in the case of the terrorists' god). In p. 180, Tsouna agrees that Epicurus is not likely to have appealed to "universal agreement" or to innate conception of the gods.

p. 178 mentions innate PROPENSITY, this is a non-empirical (David Sedley) interpretation of the gods.

LUCRETIUS seems to have been the idealist innovator, says Voula. "hupolepsis" instead of prolepsis. It's also true that Lucretius was far more hostile to religion than the founders AND says that no prolepsis can come from dreams (because there is no direct sensual apprehension when we dream). Although we have updated modern accounts of how dreams originate, this argument stands. As elsewhere, Lucretius gives an anthropological account of the origins of the gods.

Voula has her own third interpretation of the gods.

p 184 (sentence that starts "Thirdly"...) Epicurus never mentions prolepsis MUST be empirical, instead focuses on its utility (my thoughts: natural and necessary "knowledge", or knowledge that leads to nat. nec. pleasures); ergo there may be things that are useful, advantageous to believe in but may not exist as material things? Instead, these would be cultural "artifacts", "art", justice, "gods", are gods a kind of aesthetic product?

4. Focusings, epibole

epibole - "mental focusing" is defined as an active, voluntary act of attention, concentration. p 186 We must pay attention to them to derive non-evident insights or truths.

Morel argued that prolepsis required ACTIVE ASSENT and apprehension of an internal impression. He argued that epibole was inseparable and indispensable feature of prolepsis because: Herodotus 38, Menoeceus 124, PD 24

It is not an aspect of prolepsis but a distinct and separate act from anticipations. V argues this convincingly by explaining that anticipations are PASSIVE while epiboles are ACTIVE: it's the mind or thought that "casts itself forth", focuses, projects itself. In p. 190 - refutation of Morel's Kantian view using the semantics, the terms epi-ballein (active: throw, cast upon) versus prolepsis (receptive: seize, in advance), plus in prolepsis there is enargeia or clear apprehension initially, from the senses.

One note on Nietzsche's insistence that it is we who create truth and meaning: epibole has a meaning-making function, and should interest us for that reason, perhaps this is a feature of Epicurean philosophy that deserves further investigation and elaboration.

(Fourth leg of canon claim--in Diogenes Laertius 10.31: "epibole tes dianoias"--supposedly substantiated here) - V claims that later Epicureans, and specifically Philodemus, sets EPIBOLAI as a separate criterion of truth in "On signs ..." Fragment 1.13-14

Time and again, Letter to Herodotus 37-38 is mentioned (we should study this in more detail) - discusses ***the job of prolepsis****. p 191 prolepsis helps with *** "indemonstrable truths that serve as reference points to theoretical inquiry". *** Also, here in Herodotus (which is an Epicurus, original and early source) epibolai are distinct from the Canon's criteria in 38

Words are empty when there is no correspondent preconception. (this may or may not be different from "inconceivability" discussed in "Signs and inferences"), ergo prolepsis can be conceived of as the meaning of a word

The three-tiered view on Epicurean semantics is an attempt to liken Epicurean semantics to Stoic semantics, which recognizes the "sayables" as real.

1. the word: example, "a man"
2. the prolepsis of man (would be the meaning)
3. the actual, concrete man

The two-tiered view, which is more empirical and material (as no "reality" is assigned to the meaning, as it is not made of atoms) is expressed by Sextus and Plutarch, but Tsouna says this is the most likely Epicurean conception of semantics, because Epicurus wants us to focus not on semantics, but on reality: that is to say, there ARE empty words, and we must not confuse words for things.

1. the signifier or word ("man")
2. the name-bearer (the concrete man)

6th part

prenotio, anticipation (terms used in Lucretius' DRN 4.478-80)

p. 203 later Stoics and Academics equate prolepsis and other concepts. Voula claims Philodemus introduces prolepsis of "time", "infinity", "all". I'm not sure, but I thought Letter to Herodotus makes mention of time as a prolepsis, I may be wrong?. The relevant section is Herod 72-73, where she says time is treated as an accident (or non-permanent attribute of nature).

p. 204 Philodemus adds prolepsis of "good poem, good manager, good money-maker", and argues some anticipations are clearer than others. (Is this consistent with their required

enargeia?)

p 208 We see Philodemus' practice of asking / encouraging / admonishing people to RESPECT THE MEANING OF WORDS. I've also done this saying "words have meaning!". when I see dishonest speech used to justify inexcusable claims, religious or not.

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LETTER OF EPICURUS TO HERODOTUS

37-38

[37] [G](#) This method being useful even to those who are already familiarised with the laws of the universe, I recommend them, while still pursuing without intermission the study of nature, which contributes more than anything else to the tranquillity and happiness of life, to make a concise statement, or summary of their opinions.

First of all then [Herodotus](#), one must determine with exactness the notion comprehended under each separate word, in order to be able to refer to it, as to a certain criterion, the conceptions which emanate from ourselves, the ulterior researches and the difficulties; otherwise the judgment has no foundation. One goes on from demonstration to demonstration *ad infinitum*; or else one gains nothing beyond mere words. [38] [G](#) In fact, it is absolutely necessary that we should perceive directly, and without the assistance of any demonstration, the fundamental notion which every word expresses, if we wish to have any foundation to which we may refer our researches, our difficulties, and our personal judgments, whatever in other respects may be the criterion which we adopt, whether we take as our standard the impressions produced on our senses, or the actual impression in general; or whether we cling to the idea by itself, or to any other criterion.

We must also note carefully the impressions which we receive in the presence of objects, in order to bring ourselves back to that point in the circumstances in which it is necessary to suspend the judgment, or even when the question is about things, the evidence of which is not immediately perceived.

When these foundations are once laid we may pass to the study of those things, about which the evidence is not immediate. And, first of all, we must admit that nothing can come of that which does not exist; for, were the fact otherwise, then everything would be produced from everything, and there would be no need of any seed

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LETTER OF EPICURUS TO HERODOTUS

72-73 (on whether time is prolepsis)

[72] [G](#) Another important question is that of time. Here we cannot apply any more the method of examination to which we submit other objects, where we study with reference to a give subject; and which we refer to the preconceptions which exist in ourselves. We must seize, by analogy, and going round the whole circle of things comprised under this general denomination for time - we must seize, I say, that essential character which causes us to say that time is long or short. It is not necessary for that purpose to seek for any new forms of expression as preferable to those which are in common use; we may content ourselves with those by which time is usually indicated. Nor need we, as certain philosophers do, affirm any particular attribute of time, for that would be to suppose that its essence is the same as that of this attribute. It is sufficient to seek for the ingredients of which this particular nature which we call time is composed, and for the means by which it is measured. [73] [G](#) For this we have no need of demonstration; a simple exposition is sufficient. It is, in fact, evident, that we speak of time as composed of days and nights, and parts of days and nights; passiveness and impassability, movement and repose, are equally comprised in time. In short it is evident that in connection with these different states, we can conceive a particular property to which we give the name of time. ([Epicurus](#) lays down the same principles in the second book of his treatise on Nature, and in his [Great](#) Abridgment.)

It is from the infinite that the worlds are derived, and all the finite aggregates which present numerous analogies with the things which we observe under our own eyes. Each of these objects, great and small, has been separated from the infinite by a movement peculiar to itself. On the other hand, all these bodies will be successively destroyed, some more, and others less rapidly; some under the influence of one cause, and others because of the agency of some other. (It is evident, after this, that Epicurus regards the worlds as perishable, since he admits that their parts are capable of transformation. He also says in other places, that the earth rests suspended in the air.)