

# Discussion Plan For Chapter 11 "Soul, Sensation & Mind" (Norman DeWitt's "Epicurus And His Philosophy")

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## CHAPTER XI - SOUL, SENSATION, AND MIND

### 1. Introduction -

1. All conclusions about the nature of soul, sensation, and mind (just as with all other conclusory ideas) derive from deductive reasoning starting with the Twelve Elementary Principles discussed previously in Chapter 9. For example, because it has been established that nothing exists except solid bodies and void, it is deduced that the soul is itself corporeal: *"One principle from which the nature of the soul is deduced is the third: "The universe consists of solid bodies and void." It follows from this by the procedure known in logic as the excluded middle that the soul, like the body itself, is corporeal, consisting of atoms. The contrary doctrine, that the soul is incorporeal, is disposed of by deductive reasoning. Let it be assumed that the soul is incorporeal. There is nothing in nature incorporeal except the void. This, however, is incapable, on the one hand, of initiating motion or of delivering a stimulus and, on the other hand, of receiving a stimulus from a moving body, but these capacities are the characteristic attributes of the soul. Therefore the assumption is false and the contrary proposition holds true: the soul is corporeal."*
2. Nature furnishes the norm and the Sensations, Anticipations, and Feelings function as the criteria of truth.
3. "The next of the Elementary Principles from which information concerning the nature of the soul may be drawn is the last, which declares the varieties of atoms to be innumerable. The problem, therefore, is to determine which varieties of atoms compose the soul. As might be expected, it is the Feelings and Sensations that serve as criteria. Under the Feelings may be cited sudden fright, which instantly convulses the whole being. As for the Sensations, their characteristic is quickness of response to stimulus, eukinesia, and with them are to be paired the reactions of thought, dianoeseis, as of perception and memory. All of these bear witness to the extreme mobility of the soul."
4. Lucretius implies that Epicurus followed the Aristotelian division into four elements, but this is almost certainly not true, as Epicurus specified that the number of types of atoms is numberless.

### 2. The Body A Vessel

1. Due to the mobility of the soul, the body is analogized to a "vessel" which contains it and in which it must stay to remain intact. Lucretius is specific about the analogy, Epicurus states it by implication.
2. Platonists ridiculed this idea (Plutarch) and Dante made of it a form of torture in his inferno by condemning Epicurean souls to be imprisoned in coffins with their moldering corpses (since they argued the two could not be separated).
3. Cosensitivity Of Soul And Body
  1. Body and soul participate together in sensation: "first, participation in sensation by body and soul, second, simultaneousness of participation, and third, mutual causation in the experience. "
4. Rational And Irrational Soul
  1. The soul has both a rational part and an irrational part, which Dewitt discusses operates "automatically" without reason.
  2. Both parts are subject to error, but the rational soul has the capacity to find and correct errors.
5. The Workings Of Sensation
  1. All sensation is a form of "touch" and Epicurus wrote a treatise named "On Touch."
  2. This observation probably relates to the recorded statement that "seeing and hearing are just as real as feeling pain."
6. Vision
  1. Epicurus' theory of vision departed from both Democritus and Plato. Plato thought the eyes discharged beams of light, and Democritus thought that the intervening air was shaped into images by the object. Epicurus postulated the movement of atoms from subject to eyes (these are the "idols").
7. Hearing
  1. Sounds also are corporeal, and not just changing the shape of the air, as Democritus held.
  2. Friction of speaking on the throat shows the corporeal nature.
  3. Odors also held to be corporeal, which was less controversial.
8. Mind As A Supersense
  1. Mind under certain conditions can function as an organ of sensation.
  2. Famous reference to this is Lucretius referencing that we need peace of mind to sense the positive images from the gods: "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." 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."
9. Emotional Impulses
  1. Emotional impulses originate in the mind and communicate themselves outward through the body.
  2. Lucretius is not as clear here as he should be - Epicurus said that the atoms which serve as this channel of communication "resemble" those of heat, wind, and air,

and it is likely not correct to consider them the same as those.

## 10. Motor Impulses

1. "Even for an act of volition 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. Inde voluntas fit, "from this stimulus results the will to walk," if the translation may be expanded to bring out its implication. Incidentally, readers will recognize in this theory a precise anticipation of gestalt psychology."
2. But: "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, dispersed 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 confirm, however, the truth of the tradition that Epicurus believed the earth to be buoyed up by air."

## 11. Mind

1. [This subsection is the concluding summary of the whole chapter, and is very dense with important points, only some of which are referenced here.]
2. "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."
3. "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."
4. "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."
5. "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."

6. "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."