

# Key Passages in Lucretius On Images: The Impact of Images Directly On The Mind

Post by “Don” of February 6, 2021 at 8:37 AM

I'm going to say up front that, according to modern physics and science, our brains do not receive images/films/eidōlon like a radio receives radio waves.

However...

The fact that we can just sit by ourselves in a room and imagine centaurs, invent new machines, recollect deceased relatives, enjoy past pleasures, and so on, is - colloquially speaking - magical.

Also the fact that you can speak or write to me, and your actions can make images appear in my mind is - colloquially speaking - magical.

So, this wondrous property of the Cosmos required a physical, non-divine, and more importantly a non-teleologic explanation by Epicurus.

There is no way the ancients could have known about neurons or brain anatomy. I don't slight them for that one bit. They had observation and analogy to work with. That's all. They even used to think the seat of the mind was in the area of the heart because that's where you "feel" strong emotion ("My heart ached thinking about it"). From their perspective, that was plausible.

So how could the mind perceive concepts and "visualize" images, even in sleep?? How do we sense physical things? We touch them. Well, how would we see things? Images must be touching our eyes from outside. How does our mind perceive images, even while sleeping? They must be being touched by similar images from outside. Just as the eyes are not flashlights (sorry, anachronism alert) scanning the environment to see, so our minds can't be sending out beams of thought to think. They must be being touched by something from outside them. It must be very fine eidōlon! That's it! Likewise, with this explanation we don't need gods placing concepts in our minds. We receive extremely fine eidōlon from outside.

This seems to address the need for plausible explanations by the Epicureans. Does it explain the phenomenon well enough? Yes. Does it only use atoms and void in its explanation? Yep. Does it align with the precept that the gods don't interfere in the cosmos! Check. Okay, we're good to go.