Episode Sixty - Dreams and the Mind's Use of Images

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Norman DeWitt: Epicurus On Appearances

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XXX.—Epicurus, that δοκοῦντα

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An important essay of Epicurus was entitled περὶ δοκούντων. This term denotes a true presentation of a single, existent object, though reduced in scale, as it registers itself upon the vision and mind of a sane, sober, and waking person, and stands in contrast to φαινόμενα or φανταστά, which denote hybrid, distorted, or indistinct presentations. In the phrase δοκοῦντα ἐνάργεια the adjective is essential, not otiose, carrying the specific meaning of ἐνάργεια. In the system of Epicurus the term δόξαι corresponds to the ἐνάργειαι of Aristotle, a subtlemost variety of mental vision; both Aristotle and Epicurus deliberately shunned the use of εἶδος, which had been loaded with objectionable connotations by Anaxagoras and Plato. The word ἐνάργεια comes from ἐνάργής in the sense of "bright-eyed"; it means "boldness of vision, view" and belonged perhaps to the Italic area. Both Lucretius and Cicero misunderstood it to mean "feeling as", as of feeling the mind into space, mind being blind. In no thing they were misled by the prevailing fancy of a free flight of the mind or the soul through the universe. Some falsely ascribed the notion to Aristotle and Epicurus, both of whom assumed, on the contrary, a fixed, imaginary point of view, a unity ὅτι or καθό.

To the criteria of truth as stated by Epicurus, αἰσθήσεις, προλήψεις, and πάθη, certain later disciples added the δοκοῦντα ἐνάργεια τῇ διανοίᾳ.[1] Although this fact would lead us to ascribe specific meaning and exceptional importance to the above phrase, the conclusion has been reached in recent discussions of the Epicurean theory of cognition that the adjective δοκοῦντα is otiose, "because it is impossible to imagine an ἐνάργεια which is not δοκοῦντα."[2] I am here venturing to assemble evidence from the text of Epicurus for believing that an ἐνάργεια may derive from a δοκοῦντα, which is true, or from a φαινόμενον, which is either false or undependable. In the former case it will be δοκοῦντα and quite conceivably included among criteria of truth.