

Episode Sixty-Seven - Did The Gods Wake Up One Day To Create The Universe?

Post by "Cassius" of April 20, 2021 at 2:32 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

The right answer is not easy to find.

It sure isn't!!

[Quote from Don](#)

I'm still not clear how imagination works in an Epicurean context. Do we combine images and concepts that are extant in the world?

I see why you would say that because I recall especially Elayne making remarks in podcasts from book four connecting "images" and "imagination." I would say that she was doing so, as you say, considering the whole idea of images to be a sort of allegory, and not to be taken literally. From her perspective she ruled out the use of the mind as a "suprasensory" organism (I think that's the term DeWitt applied to it) so she was making sense of it as best she could as something she maintains cannot be taken literally.

I would not take that approach - I think these passages were meant to be taken literally - so I would not at all consider "imagination" as we use that term to be connected to Epicurean "images." Therefore I don't think it is possible to understand the Epicurean context or Lucretius' view of this theory without taking him literally that there are "images" made of particles which our eyes cannot see but which retain - as they travel through space - shape and/or other characteristic information of the thing from which they are emitted.

So if someone wants to think about what WE consider to be "imagination" they would simply be talking about the storage of concepts and/or pictures (again something that Elayne questioned, if I recall) in the mind, and then the mind's manipulation of those memories as part of the thinking process.

If someone wants to think about what Epicurus/Lucretius was talking about, in my opinion I think they have to start with the premise that the main subject indeed involves the flow of elemental particles off of all bodies, how those flows travel through space and interfere with each other, and how the mind as a direct sensory organism receives them from outside the brain and processes them.

This was a point of contention either on or off the air of some of those podcasts from book four. I certainly am not in a position of saying with confidence that I agree with Epicurus and Lucretius that such a mechanism in fact exists, but I am not ready to rule it out as impossible. With more confidence, however, I would say that it's clear to me that Epicurus and Lucretius took this contention seriously, so no matter to what extent we agree or disagree that Epicurus was right about this aspect of his theology, I do believe they intended to be taken literally.

Also - and I am glad you reminded me to say this! - there was a point or two in the podcast where you made the point being made here to the effect that the images traveling through space are the main way that we "know" of the existence of gods. I think that's not the best reading of the Velleius material, and I think DeWitt is correct that Velleius' reference is pretty clearly that anticipations of the gods are engraved on the mind at birth, before any "images" from or to the gods have been transmitted. So at least as for me when I am discussing the theology it's my intent to always state that the texts support **two** potential means of information about the gods: (1) transmission of the images, and (2) the innate etching on the brain which exists at birth but develops naturally as we age.

Getting back specifically to "Do we combine images and concepts that are extant in the world?" I would say that the answer there under the theory would most certainly be yes, but I would connect the "extant in the world" to the eternal universe premise. For that reason there has never been a time when all parts of the universe were not full of images flowing through the air, some of which maintain their original shape/information while others have so interfered with each other, or traveled such distances that they are distorted to the point of losing most or all of their original shapes. I think that seems to be what they are saying, but again I see that process as very distinct from memory - the storing of information data in the mind and the manipulation of that data into new combinations as we process that data. I would see those processes to be so different and distinct as to be pretty much totally disconnected from each other, except to the extent that thoughts are influenced by new images constantly being received, just like our thoughts are affected by the things we see or hear as we are thinking.