

# Was The Epicurean Theory of Images Meant By Epicurus To Take The Place of Conventional Views of "Memory" As A Storage Mechanism?

**Post by "Cassius" of April 21, 2021 at 5:35 AM**

In recent discussions largely arising from the Lucretius Today podcast, the suggestion has been made that the Epicurean theory of images explains, and takes the place of, what might be described as the conventional view of memory as a device for storing pictures or other information and retrieving them at will.

In other words, did Epicurus intend us to understand that the mind's ability to select from images "floating through space" is how we should understand the capacity to "remember things" to function?

I will say that as to my current thinking, I personally would answer this question "no," but I can certainly see why this suggestion might be made. It would therefore be helpful to see if we can gather examples from the Epicurean texts in which functions of "memory" are apparently being discussed, and examine them to see what they might show on this question.

Despite my inclination to the "no" answer, perhaps a very clear instance that supports "yes" would be the reference in the letter of Cicero to Cassius in which Cicero teases Cassius by questioning him as to whether Cicero's thoughts of Cassius had been spurred by "spectres" floating through the air. My interpretation of the answer given by Cassius is that Cassius refutes the notion, but his answer is possibly ambiguous, and the fact that Cicero even asks the question indicates that this line of thought was a possibility.

Let's use this thread to discuss the issue, including the suggestion that modern research has disproven the notion that memory works through the storage of pictures or other specific information in the mind. Is that the case? Even if it is the case, what would that development indicate as to Epicurus' position on these questions?