

# Anticipations - Justice & Divine Nature

Post by "Cassius" of August 15, 2021 at 6:05 PM

Eric you have highlighted a passage in DeWitt that I agree is very important but where I have a different point of view than DeWitt:

Quote

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.

In my view DeWitt would have been better off if he had not used the word "idea" here and had instead used a word like "principle." Not to split hairs, but I think to suggest that we are born with fully formed "ideas" would be a form of Platonism that Epicurus was reacting against. DeWitt consistently points out how Epicurus is antiPlatonic in many areas, and he should have carried over that analogy more clearly in this area as well.

In my view, the anticipations have to be considered to be a "faculty" that is equivalent to the five senses and the feeling of pleasure. Faculties is a reference to mechanisms that work through principles, like eyes involve natural "physical" principles of optics and hearing involves natural "physical" principles of sounds. We are not born with "ideas" of shapes or sizes or colors, we are born with a faculty of sight which perceives those qualities about things when we "see" them through the physics involved in optics. We are not born with "ideas" of music or symphonies or claps of thunder, we are born with a faculty of hearing that perceives those things when we are exposed to the physical phenomena involved with sound, for the first time after birth. We are not born with feelings of pleasure in ice cream or pleasure in sex or pleasure in dancing, we are born with a faculty that perceives those pleasures through the physical principles involved in the way we are "wired" for pleasure and pain, when we experience those phenomena for the first time.

Likewise I think it is not correct to suggest that we are born with "ideas" of justice such as equality before the law or contracts or cooperation or teamwork. We are born with a faculty of perceiving that something called "justice" is involved in certain situations and arrangements when we perceive those arrangements for the first time. We are not born with an "idea" of a god being omnipotent or omniscient or even self-sufficient. We are born with a faculty of perceiving that there is a spectrum of perfection in living beings, and that as we come into contact with examples of living beings we can recognize that there is a way to rank living beings in terms of how successful they are in living.

I think that "ideas" as that term is generally understood (fully formed concepts) is very different from "principles" of operation of the faculties that nature gave us, which is all very "preconceptual."

So I think DeWitt is correct that anticipations are something we are born with, but instead of suggesting that they are "ideas" he should have suggested that there is a "faculty of anticipations" which involved physical principles of operation that dispose us to form concepts in certain ways in those areas of human life.

And in addition, it seems to me critical to observe that just as any single sight or hearing or touch may not be "true to all the facts" of what we are seeing or hearing or touching, just as Epicurus said in the letter to Menoeceus, it is possible for "anticipations" not to be true to the facts as well, as when people have anticipations about the nature of gods that are incorrect, such as when they think that the gods are like themselves. That means that there can also be anticipations of justice that can be incorrect, such as when we think that justice can or should be the same for all people at all times and all places, which Epicurus says specifically is not the case.

I recognize that my thoughts here are not fully-formed and are more assertions than something that can be considered firmly established, but this is personally how I think is the best way to extend the direction that DeWitt was correctly moving, but (in my humble opinion) did not state quite as well as he could have.