

Thoughts on Anticipations

Post by “A Singh” of September 2, 2016 at 6:41 AM

There has been a detailed discussion on FB group on the topic of Preconceptions/ Anticipations recently, shedding light on many aspects of this important third leg of the Epicurean Canon. In this post I will try to highlight one particular aspect of preconceptions which I find most intriguing and useful. That aspect is the faculty of Mental visualisation/Imagination/3D Map of reality in one's head and I strongly think that this mental visualisation faculty is equipped with certain pre-existing biological phenomenon (Preconceptions) that is responsible for producing the Ideas of Conceivable and Inconceivable projections in the form of mental intuitions in us (Provided this faculty has not been subjugated and taken over by “Pure reason” through extensive conditioning thereby over riding its authority as supreme judge for truth determination). Operationally its likely be similar in biological basis as in the case of pre-wired ideas of justice, friendship etc developed during evolution of our species.

most normal humans are born with a capacity to visualise the physical world in their minds, a sort of like a blank projector on which anything can be played using either direct input (Visual sensory) or thought commands for memory activation/visualisation. Where we are faced with direct clear input of senses to produce projections (as in our every day experience with our surroundings) we have no ambiguities. Where sense data is not clear cut errors can arise in interpretation due to our preference of some alternative explanation over others for various reasons and this point is well known to Epicureans.

In addition to direct sensory mechanisms humans have evolved another supertool- Symbols- to represent reality. These symbols can be sounds or figurative representations as in languages, words, shapes, diagrams, geometrical and mathematical representations. Now the reality only consists of atoms and void and nothing else. Most of the symbols have been invented to represent physical reality and to make communication easier among humans for survival (Ruun Tiger.....for example) In the world of symbols lies a new “thing” which really exist only in the human thought (neural connections) and no where else - Concepts. As a typical human grows up in today's world not much attention/training is provided to distinguish this powerful but madeup construction -Concepts- from his other actual physical sensory perceptions. Consequently he or she grows up somewhat muddled up and if enough Aristotelian/Platonic training/conditioning is provided to override trust in his own sensory mechanism he will grow up to be cocksure about his conceptual reality (think religious people or academics for example) without realising the error in the process.

Now coming back to original topic how do I make that claim in the first place. Firstly during my study of Epicurean texts (Mainly from Cassius's resources) I was immediately struck with the realisation that most of what I read made clear visual picture in my head and corresponded perfectly with my sense perceptions in terms of its conceivability without rousing any

ambiguity. It was as if the jigsaw was fitting together with all the parts lining up together in perfect harmony from the big picture to the smallest and only details remained to be filled up with accuracy. I will try to explain this in detail by using an example of one of Epicurean assumptions to build a model of reality. For this I will reverse engineer the Epicurean assumption about our universe that the universe is infinite. How did Epicurus arrive at this conclusion and why I should believe it. Now the only way to settle this question is to visualise the universe in our heads and traverse it with a imaginary spear in our hand to mark the boundary if we happen to find it. Travelling far and wide beyond even the visible horizon of the universe we are unable to fathom any boundary as we will then have to explain what lies beyond the boundary. This knowledge that there can be no boundary to the universe is produced by a certain kind of inborn faculty or intuition of the mental visualisation which is independent of reasoning or learning and it tells us what is conceivable in terms of its existence and what is inconceivable i.e. that cannot exist. A universe that is bounded is inconceivable by this visualisation faculty if we trust its judgement and we have no other means to refute it. It therefore follows from this example that our mental visualisation faculties are pre-equipped with intuitions of certain kinds that tell us (where the evidence is not direct) that what can be i.e. conceivable and what cannot be i.e. inconceivable. This tool can help us greatly in the areas where there are multiple possibilities and the correct use of this faculty can tell us what is more plausible or conceivable.

I believe this ability to visualise with its intuitive sense of conceivable probability is among one of the keys to our understanding of the nature of things (For using alongside the true Epicurean reasoning of cause and effect derived from the 12 elemental observations including matter being uncreatable and indestructible). Language and reasoning are powerful tools but useful only to the extent that they can help us in making coherent conceivable mental projections of the things they are trying to convey otherwise they are just empty symbols devoid of any real meaning and wasting our most precious and limited resource of our lives -Our Time.

No claim of any scholarship is made and this posting is more of an Epicurean peasants output.