

Preconceptions and PD24

Post by "Cassius" of December 29, 2021 at 8:40 AM

Continuing to try to think through these issues, as I reflect on our past discussions about anticipations, I currently think:

(1) That the path most likely to be productive is going to be something similar to a "pattern assembly" and/or "pattern recognition faculty, without which we would not even recognize that there are commonalities between things that upon further thinking we find similar in ways we can name.

(2) The most important question in the analysis is not about the mechanism, but the related issue of "content." If you take the position that anticipations are "true" or "false" in the same sense as we consider concepts to be true or false, then you will inevitably end up with Plato's ideal forms. You will conclude that Nature has somehow created on its own, and likely from eternity, certain "ideas" that exist in some way external to us, that we can eventually "recognize" through the rational use of our minds. So the closer you get to thinking that anticipations are fully formed ideas (in other words, you translate anticipations as "concepts" as Bailey does) then the closer you are to Plato and thinking that certain ideas are somehow created or blessed by Nature for us to recognize and adopt.

(3) I think DeWitt is correct in taking to task Diogenes Laertius' description of the formation of anticipations through repeated observations. Repeated observations can be part of the process of refining our thoughts, but they can't be the starting point. Something had to be in place previously so that the first time you saw a cow, or an ox, you had a faculty of absorbing certain parts of the observation into connections, that you then over time developed, through thinking and repeated observations, into the word "cow" or "ox." But that part of the process is the conceptual reasoning process, in which you think about the various attributes and decide what is and is not essential to your definition of "ox" and "cow." The pre-conceptual part, the part which it seems to me Epicurus is pointing to as anticipations, must involve an automatic, pre-rational, faculty (like the eyes or ears) that are turned to assemble perceptual data in certain ways, but which are not themselves pre-loaded with "ideas" to be recognized.

And that gets back to the error in my statements above. Concepts are true or false as a result of reasoning about them; we say $2 + 2 = 4$ by definition, and we can say an equation is true or false due to our definitions. But a faculty like sight or hearing (or presumably anticipations) is only true or false in the sense of "how much of the full picture of all the facts are these perceptions accurately conveying to our minds?" Because neither the eyes nor the ears nor the anticipations (presumably) deliver "conclusions" to us; they just deliver raw data that we then ourselves have to evaluate is pleasurable or painful or blue or yellow or a tree or a flower or whatever.