

Godfrey's Epicurean Outline

Post by "Cassius" of December 10, 2018 at 9:16 PM

Godfrey thank you for the time it took to post this! I will have more detailed comments but I see that you are interested in the anticipations aspect, and I have just tonight been exchanging some comments with [Elayne](#), so this is a good place to post and preserve them. I have tried to edit this to make it less choppy, but here is sort of where we started, talking about anticipations and "justice."

We know (1) what Epicurus said explicitly in [PD30-40](#) about justice and he referred to agreements, and we know (2) also the general background that there is a faculty of anticipations that operates to generate "preconceptions." I think also that we should analogize that anticipations work like the faculty of sight and all the others, for example in that the eyes report what they perceive, producing data that our ****minds**** then process and organize into higher-level information. (With the important point there being that opinion error occurs in the mind, and that the faculties are just reporting, not assembling conclusions. Remember that Epicurus referred to false conclusions from anticipations about the gods.)

We have to find a way to combine (1) and (2).

My first stab at organizing this would be to suggest that the leash law is an example of a high-level arrangement to which the people in that locality more or less "agree" to by the fact that they remain in the society and aren't in open revolt, even though they may not like or follow the leash law. To the extent that the neighbor has violated the leash law, that probably constitutes an "injustice" which would be analyzed as a species of the abstraction we call "justice."

But just like sight processes all kind of perceptions all the time, I would say that to consider anticipations as a faculty means that they are operating all the time as well. If anticipations are an "organizational faculty," (I'm using scare quotes, not quoting anybody) then organizing things that happen into relationships allows us to recognize that once we have met someone, shaken hands, exchanged gifts, etc, we are in the process of generating a relationship that leads to certain expectations. Then, if those expectations are violated, the anticipatory faculty would probably lead you to organize that violation into something that more or less approaches something you would eventually call injustice. Then as part of the process of organizing these potentially violation events into something that is recognizable (not necessarily fully formed concepts), the faculty of pleasure / pain has something to evaluate and process into a feeling of "painful."

I think the main point would be that if you didn't have a faculty of anticipations that predisposed you to begin to assemble handshakes and smiles and interactions into

progressively more complex relationships, it would never occur to you to begin to categorized these events into a relationship which would eventually call for a label of "just" or "unjust" or "pleasurable" or "painful." So I agree with you that these things can happen at an "intuitive" level and that the reactions of pain and pleasure can occur even before the event is organized into the fully-formed concept of "my neighbor violated the leash law."

In contrast, no matter how many times you pet the spider, the spider will never grasp that you are trying to be its friend and that you want a relationship of justice or injustice. (Possibly we may even need to go further down the line to be absolutely sure of that, but I've never been particularly fond of spiders so I doubt that they have much conceptual organizing power 😊)

All this is just my opinion of course, as an attempt to organize the possibilities.

Then further I encourage Elayne to study this further and said:

Just please please please be prepared for the blowback, and remember that the DeWitt position on this (which I am channeling) is held in low esteem in the academic community. Of course maybe "low esteem" isn't accurate -- how about "banished from memory as if he never existed"? 😊 Whenever I say something like this don't think I am hedging, it's just that I am one of those people who believes that all of this is useless if we can't document our position, and if blur over the fact that disputes exist. I am fully persuaded that DeWitt is correct and the "anticipations are conceptions" majority is wrong, but at this point with the set of texts that are remaining it's certainly "possible" to argue both sides. I think it's clear why DeWitt argues as he does, and it's easy to see where it leads if we consider anticipations to equal conceptions - but there are many scholars who disagree.

On the other hand anyone who takes on the assignment of supporting Epicurus in giving the central role to "pleasure" will probably find the argument about anticipations to be a tea party in comparison.

And --

David Sedley is a well-known Epicurean scholar and he wrote an article called "Epicurus' Theological Innatism" in which he explores the Epicurean argument for the existence of gods and how that relates to anticipations. We can get that article for you if you'd like it but like most academic articles it really just explores the issues without coming to many conclusions. I recall that there was a subsequent article after that, commenting on Sedley's views of anticipations, and I'll look that up and post a reference. I have it now, it is a 2016 article by Voula Tsouna entitled "Epicurean Preconceptions."

Godfrey I post all that to encourage you to continue to read DeWitt's explanation as the best introduction, but to prepare you for the controversy about this that you will read in other sources. If you read only the academic sources, you will think DeWitt never existed, and his

arguments don't even merit mentioning.

Let me stop there for the moment and comment on the articles:

It has been a while since I read the Tsouna article and I recall being dissatisfied with it, but I do think I recall that it dealt somewhat fairly with the argument I am describing as Dewitt's I think I am correct in saying "of course, she never mentions that DeWitt exists...." yep, I thought I remembered this -- her position is "preconceptions are concepts" --

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While I am not sure that Tsouna summarizes him correctly, she does address the "innatist" argument by addressing Sedley:

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Here she states what is I think pretty close to the DeWitt position:

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but then she goes off into the necessity for visual input, which is the point of contention, really, so in the end she digs in to the "preconceptions are concepts formed after exposure to evidence" position. But here I'll leave you -- it is a fascinating argument I think!

I'll just leave you with the thought that I think "predisposition" is the key word here, and that if in fact it is a true "predisposition" then that predisposition is something that exists BEFORE exposure to any sensory examples, which I analogize to "when I was born I was born made up in such a way that I would eventually find vanilla ice cream pleasing before I ever tasted ice cream" or "when I was born I was born predisposed to see light between certain wavelengths before I ever opened my eyes" or whatever.