

Supernatural and the Senses

Post by “Matt” of January 13, 2022 at 3:05 PM

I am having a fascinating discussion with someone who is deep into believing in supernatural things. Kind of beyond the usual “religious” view into the realm of occultism etc. I honestly didn’t realize this person believed what they apparently do, and it was brought up as if it’s a common casual thing to doso I pressed her on it.

This whole discussion relates to the Epicurean idea that the senses are the standard for truth. This particular person believes she sees “things” like angels, spirits, demons etc. I truly don’t believe this person is mentally ill, but I must now evaluate this situation based in my knowledge of Epicurean Philosophy. Because we need to draw a distinct demarcation line in the sand between casual superstition, harmful beliefs and prudent reasoning.

Again, I truly don’t believe this person is clinically ill, but now I’m forced to analyze their behavior and their conclusions.

As Epicureans, we do not believe in supernatural anything. Full stop.

So any explanation must preclude supernaturalism to be the conclusion. So that leaves two options either the person is in fact ill (with some sort of physio-chemical aberration in the brain) or this phenomena is a sort of social immaturity or imaginative delusion of superstitious idealism that has been allowed to prosper because society allows it to persist and eventually the person believes their imaginative false experiences are somehow relevant or true. Like believing a brief daydream of dragons flying through clouds has reality other than in your own mind. We know it’s just an imaginative daydream, but to others who hold these particular beliefs about spiritual realms etc. they may believe they have “insight” into these realms.

A delusion for a mentally ill person is “real” for them. As real as they cognitively can process that the experience is real and true, such as seeing things or hearing voices. That is a real phenomena in the chemical and physiological makeup of a person’s brain who has a diagnosis. But for someone who doesn’t have something affecting their neural processes “seeing” and “hearing” things is pure imagination.

And I will take the position that people who maintain these “beliefs” are socially immature or at worse fraudsters. I believe the person I’m speaking to now is in the socially immature camp, though they are well into their 50’s. They are claiming to see things that children might claim are invisible friends.

Where this is relevant is that we can see that the Epicurean standard of truth, a strong basis in reality and sensory data is critical for a person’s social and mental well being. Believing in supernaturalism, even casually, will lead to very different conclusions about reality and as with

the person I'm speaking with, it separates us from each other by testifying that one of us is speaking truth while the other is lying.

At this point a person must use prudent judgement for the best to "correct" this person. Either by using frank speech to shock them out of their imaginings by letting them know they are in jeopardy of having their friends lose faith in their ability to perceive reality or simply to leave the person to their imaginings neither reinforcing them but also never speaking of them again. I guess it depends on the relationship a person has with the other.