

The Best Simple Term To Use For "Anticipations" (?)

Post by "Cassius" of December 31, 2018 at 10:18 AM

Here is an abstract of a discussion held on Facebook in December 2018. We were discussing a question by Nate as to the most "accessible" term to use for preconception / anticipation / prolepsis:

Elli:

1. Let's give the etymology of this greek word that he used. It consists from the preposition "pre" [=προ] and the verb "receive" [=λαμβάνω]. This means that from the day of our birth and as human beings, we have the ability to pre-receive things and complex concepts (with the usage of the words) and during the procedure of our adulthood, we confirm what is FALSE or TRUE in accordance, of course, to the reality around us.

2. Let's re-read this important passage of Epicurus letter to Herodotus for understanding what these "prolepsis" are that Epicurus placed in his Canon as a standard of truth. IMO the english word "pre-conceptions" is more near what Epicurus meant as "prolepsis" than the word "anticipations".

The passage : <<First of all, Herodotus, we must grasp the ideas attached to words ((important note : CONCEPTS ATTACHED TO WORDS)), in order that we may be able to refer to them and so to judge the inferences of opinion or problems of investigation or reflection, so that we may not either leave everything uncertain and go on explaining to infinity or use words devoid of meaning ((important note : we have to be CAREFUL NOT USING WORDS DEVOID OF MEANING)).

For this purpose it is essential that ** the first mental image associated with each word should be regarded, and that there should be no need of explanation, if we are really to have a standard to which to refer a problem of investigation or reflection or a mental inference**((important note : IMO in this paragraph describes "prolepsis"-pre-conceptions))....

...and besides we must keep all our investigations in accord with our sensations, and in particular with the immediate apprehensions whether of the mind or of any one of the instruments of judgment, and likewise in accord with the feelings existing in us, in order that we may have indications whereby we may judge both the problem of sense perception and the unseen>>.

4. In the above passage Epicurus describes his methodology of the CANON which includes (in a full cooperation) the fourth criteria of truth that

IMO they have to be connected with an AND : 1) and the senses 2) and the feelings pleasure/pain 3) and the preconceptions 4) and the intuitions.

Cassius:

1) Elli I agree with you that "preconception" seems much more clear and more likely to be correct than "anticipations."

2) Elayne, I am tagging you here because this may be the first time you have seen this argument, which is a point raised regularly by our Greek friends. I will use the candor of your recent post to say that I am not sure that I agree with this argument, but it clearly is a part of the issue, if not the only part. I am talking about the issue of the "first mental image associated with each word." As I understand it, this is a topic DeWitt addresses in dealing with "phantasia" for example on page 137 of EAHP.

As you see, Elli is in her item 4 stating that there are four canons of truth, by dividing preconceptions from intuitions.

DeWitt does not do that, and he cites to Diogenes Laertius to the sentence which is translated Now in The Canon Epicurus affirms that our sensations and preconceptions and our feelings are the standards of truth; the Epicureans generally make perceptions of mental presentations to be also standards. His own statements are also to be found in the Summary addressed to Herodotus and in the [Principal Doctrines](#)."

My mind is open on what the correct perspective is on all this, but I personally tend to follow DeWitt, that considering there to be Four criteria of truth was an innovation of later Epicureans, not of Epicurus himself, and I personally am very cautious about that, for the reasons that DeWitt addresses.

I wish I had a stronger position on this, and if pushed I take the DeWitt position, but I readily admit that there is evidence that a significant number of Epicureans thought this (4 criteria and not 3) was a good argument.

I think I can summarize the Dewitt / 3 criteria position by saying that those who hold there to be only 3 think that what is being described as the 4th is part of mental processing where assembly and use of opinion is involved, and that is unrelated to "preconceptions." Your mileage may vary,

Cassius:

DeWitt's commentary on why he did not think Epicurus considered this phenomena to be a fourth criteria is on page 140 of EAHP (and perhaps another place too, this is the one I recall best):

[49690901_966269393761210_7777209587119161344_n.jpg?_nc_cat=102&_nc_ht=scontent-atl3-1.xx&oh=0](#)

Another point: Dividing them into four under the model Elli has cited means that either her (3) preconceptions or (4) intuitions (but not both) are the words that stand in the place of

"perceptions of mental presentations" used by Diogenes Laertius. So if there are four criteria, and "perceptions of mental presentations" is the definition of one (presumably it's the definition of "preconceptions" under that model) then what is the definition of "intuitions"?

Elayne:

I don't know enough about the traditions and translations to have an opinion on what Epicurus said-- you all are a better judge of that. But in my understanding of how our brains work, the 4 would work for me in modern terms. Preconceptions sounding similar to what "innate intuitions" would be in developmental neurology-- the actual content of the preconception, already there at birth; and intuition meaning the faculty of pattern recognition that gives us quick answers but using learned information, not innate.

I think trying to make the preconceptions_ only_ a faculty, with no information already there, will not work, because we use that same faculty for learned processes. The thing that distinguishes preconceptions is that it is something we are born "knowing" without having had feeling or sensory contact.

If we don't do it that way, then you are left having to explain what causes this faculty to come up with "justice", etc, in a way that does not involve feelings or the sense organs. But really we are evolved with that tit-for-tat thing from the beginning. It isn't learned. That would be very inefficient.

- I don't know if I'm making myself clear-- some of that conversation above between you and Elli was confusing to me, so it may be that I am missing what you all are saying.

Elli:

Moreover, we must suppose that human nature too was taught and constrained to do many things of every kind merely by circumstances; and that later on reasoning elaborated what had been suggested by nature and made further inventions, in some matters quickly, in others slowly, at some epochs and times making great advances, and lesser again at others. And so names too were not at first deliberately given to things, but men's natures according to their different nationalities had their own peculiar feelings and received their peculiar impressions, and so each in their own way emitted air formed into shape by each of these feelings and impressions, according to the differences made in the different nations by the places of their abode as well.

And then later on by common consent in each nationality special names were deliberately given in order to make their meanings less ambiguous to one another and more briefly demonstrated. And sometimes those who were acquainted with them brought in things hitherto unknown and introduced sounds for them, on some occasions being naturally constrained to utter them, and on others choosing them by reasoning in accordance with the prevailing mode of formation, and thus making their meaning clear.

(From Epicurus epistle to Herodotus)

Cassius:

Actually, Nate, in thinking about what Elli has written above, there are actually two issues to be addressed: (1) Taking a position on the best term to use for "preconceptions/intuitions/anticipations/etc" and (2) Taking a position on whether there are three criteria of truth, or four. In my writing I generally try to deal with this in a footnote just to make people aware of the controversy, but that's not to say you need to do that here.

Cassius:

I think this is one of those issues, like details of what Epicurus thought about gods, that we better be careful about taking too strong a position. However I think I can summarize a danger here that ought to be considered carefully before accepting:

First, I think we all probably agree on a couple of things:

(1) After we gather evidence, reason through, and evaluate any subject, our minds constructs a "word" or a "picture" or a "definition" - which is probably what we refer to when we say "conception." I think we would all probably agree that that process is what is labeled "reasoning" or "conceptual reasoning, with the point being is that in the end we construct a "concept" in our mind, such as "capitalism" or "cows."

(2) We probably also all agree that we store these concepts in our minds, and the next time we are confronted with "capitalism" or "cows" we say to ourselves "I know what that is, it is a cow or an example of capitalism.

(3) I think we (probably?) all agree that this process in (1) and (2) goes on all the time in humans, and this is called conceptual reasoning, and that in assigning words to our experiences we use our own opinions about what each word/concept should mean.

(4) Probably we also agree that in this process of painting our own pictures, and assigning our own definitions to words, and in matching these word/pictures, to new examples, we employ our own opinions and decisionmaking. In other words, there is no master definition of cows and capitalism floating in the air, so all of us may have (will have) different definitions of those words and different pictures in our minds about what makes a cow or an instance of capitalism.

It seems to me that the controversy is whether any part of the process described above is properly called "anticipations" or "preconceptions" or "prolepsis."

If the word/picture developed in this process, which is stored in the mind, is considered to be a "criteria of truth," then this criteria is something that is developed in our mind after a process of conscious reasoning and opinion-evaluating. This conclusion is unavoidable because just as

there are many languages and words for "cow," there is no "essence of a cow" (Aristotle) or "ideal form of a cow" (Plato) against which all of us can check our own local definition.

The distinction here to be sure we want to embrace is that all other criterias of truth (sight, sound, taste, touch, smell, pleasure, pain) operate without conscious evaluation, without prior reasoning, without any opinion whatsoever. The word picture we create ourselves, however, cannot be said to have been created without conscious evaluation, without prior reasoning, and without any opinion whatsoever.

I don't think any of us want to consider the authority of unnamed "Epicureans Generally" as cited by DL, so that leads us back to Herodotus, quoted by Elli above:

"For this purpose it is essential that ** the first mental image associated with each word should be regarded, and that there should be no need of explanation, if we are really to have a standard to which to refer a problem of investigation or reflection or a mental inference**"

And so each of us have to decide whether, in this passage, Epicurus is saying:

(1) Form word pictures in your minds, and then in the future those word /pictures have equal status as criteria with what your eyes, ears, pain, pleasure, etc tell you....

(2) When you *do* reason about what your eyes and ears tell you, be sure that you are thinking as clearly as possible about the concepts you form, because chain reasoning depends on every link of the chain being as accurate as possible.

If he is saying (1) then he is endorsing four criteria of truth. If he is saying (2) then there are three criteria, plus an important rule of clear thinking.

What DeWitt is concerned about, and has me persuaded of, is that if you follow the road of option one, then you have re-introduced "logical reasoning" into the canon of truth, which it was the whole purpose of canon to avoid in the first place. That is because if we are entitled to consider our own opinions as equivalent in force to what our eyes, ears, pleasure and pain tell us, then we are elevating our opinions to equal (and eventually higher) status than what nature provides to us directly and without possibility of mistake through the other non-rational criteria.

And if our own opinions as created in our own minds have equal status, or priority over, the perceptions provided by the senses, then we are back on the road to radical skepticism. Everyone has their own opinions, no one can logically prove that one opinion is better than another, and we are back in the skepticism of Pyrrho and Plato that we originally set out to avoid.

Elli:

"And every image which we obtain by an act of apprehension on the part of the mind or of the sense-organs, whether of shape or of properties, this image is the shape or the properties of the concrete object, and is produced by the constant repetition of the image or the impression it has left. Now falsehood and error always lie in the addition of opinion with regard to what is waiting to be confirmed or not contradicted, and then is not confirmed or is contradicted. For the similarity between the things which exist, which we call real and the images received as a likeness of things and produced either in sleep or through some other acts of apprehension on the part of the mind or the other instruments of judgment, could never be, unless there were some effluences of this nature actually brought into contact with our senses.

And error would not exist unless another kind of movement too were produced inside ourselves, closely linked to the apprehension of images, but differing from it; and it is owing to this, supposing it is not confirmed, or is contradicted, that falsehood arises; but if it is confirmed or not contradicted, it is true. Therefore we must do our best to keep this doctrine in mind, in order that on the one hand the standards of judgment dependent on the clear visions may not be undermined, and on the other error may not be as firmly established as truth and so throw all into confusion". (Epicurus letter to Herodotus)

[Cassius](#), I have the impression that in the above Epicurus is clear as he describes the "PROCEDURE". Since he leaves the person FREE to be able to make speculations and be judged and by himself and others if his opinion/speculation is with regard to what is waiting to be confirmed or not contradicted, and then what is not confirmed or is contradicted by the senses and feelings in accordance with the reality.

And imo this is the procedure that the scientists built up their theories : They are based on past scientific knowledges (these are the "prolepsis") and then they're publishing their new theories and their phd's in scientific magazines, while they are waiting to be confirmed and not contradicted by the phenomena of Nature and the experiments of their science. I do not get all the trouble that caused of what means the word "prolepsis" !

However, imo and if I understand clearly the whole issue...

1. According to Epicurus everything that provokes motion in the brain is "real" because an image of the materialistic reality left its trace to that brain, until the time that that "real" will become totally FALSE IF it is not confirmed and contradicted by the senses, and the feelings based on the examination of the experiences (in the science these are called experiments) and all the causes that caused the phenomena in the procedure in the study of Nature !

2. Epicurus accepts the issue on "subconscious" that is a function of the brain too for hiding fears, desires and feelings. Example : there are many times that I have the impression of a dream that it was so real that provokes to me feelings during the time that I was dreaming. But when I woke up, I confirmed with my senses and feelings that this dream was not real. But it was REAL, because it was based on images of the reality that those images are in accordance

with my senses and feelings too. So, Epicurus in the above paragraph gives us an idea what are the prolepsis, and what are those "fantastic impressions of the mind", to make the future Epicureans placing this issue as the fourth criterion of truth in the Canon.

Cassius:

Elli most of what you wrote I agree with, but I can put my finger on one part I probably don't, here, referring to scientific articles:

"They are based on past scientific knowledges (these are the "prolepsis") and then they're publishing their new theories and their phd's in scientific magazines, while they are waiting to be confirmed and not contradicted by the phenomena of Nature and the experiments of their science."

See by the time you get to the point where your theory is a scientific article, I would say surely it is by then a "concept" involving opinion. I would never consider a concept to be a "standard of truth" or a "tool of precision in measuring truth" -- that would be a feedback loop in which you would never escape the error in a prior concept, if you accepted it as a standard of truth.

That's why I think the analogy that "standards of truth" are "tools of precision" and not "truth written in stone." The Judea-Christians for example consider the Ten Commandments to be "standards of truth" because they consider them to be "truth" because god supposedly wrote them.

In an infinite universe where there is no center, and where no one's perspective can be said to be "final," then I don't think it is possible to say that one concept is itself a "standard of truth."

All we have in the end are the "tools of precision" by which we measure and ascertain those "truths" which are relevant to us.

Cassius:

Actually I think that last point leads to a very important question. Is it possible / would Epicurus have taught / that any IDEA of any kind can ever be a standard of truth? And when I say "idea" I mean any "word / mental picture"?

Elli:

Since Epicurus excluded all the Myths from our investigations and researches then the issue is getting more easy and clear for finding where is the false and where is the right in accordance with the study of Nature ! But the procedure in the Canon starts from what the words denote in any language. Since the human beings are talking for finding the obvious. And imo it is the only standard that Epicurus accepts when we read the above excerpt in his letter to Herodotus of what the words denote. And then the procedure that is based on the Canon too, continues to separate the fantastic from the reality. In the above he describes the procedure.

Elayne:

[Cassius](#), it sounds to me as if you are equating intuitions with a type of reasoning, and that is not how the brain works. Intuitions-- the very fast cognitions-- are not logical or reasoning based, and they can be much more accurate than logic. So accepting intuitions as a specific way to interact with reality is not getting into logic or idealism, even though it involves thought. It's closer to a feeling than to logical thought. There are heuristics involved but these are not logical.