

Episode 163 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 17 - Chapter 8 - Sensations, Anticipations, And Feelings 04

Post by "Cassius" of February 23, 2023 at 10:15 PM

I am pasting here some private discussions that we have had in the last few days in preparation for this upcoming podcast, in which Don is going to join us. What follows are comments from several sources, noted with the author at the start:

DON:

In all seriousness, I'll put my cards on the table prior to the recording here. And I'm going to try and pin these to things I've read... however, I don't have the citations at hand. Thoughts are, of course, welcome!

- IF prolepseis are part of Canonic (criteria of truth), they have to be pre-rational, a faculty that isn't involved in concept-formation.
- Therefore, a prolepsis is NOT like a stored word in linguistics. The word does not come first.
- I believe I got this from Glidden but it made immediate sense. I hope I'm interpreting his paper correctly:
 - Aisthesis - sensation simply registers incoming stimuli
 - Pathe - pleasure and pain - register an emotional, pre-rational reaction to stimuli
 - Prolepsis - recognizes patterns - especially recurring patterns - from the sensations. It is those recurring patterns that cognition and reason work on to assign names to.
- The prolepseis recognize recurring patterns. The sensations - aisthesis - cannot assemble forms or recognize patterns. I'm making the analogy of pixels. The sensations will determine what color an individual pixel is. The sensations cannot recognize a pattern of pixels. The prolepsis does assemble collections of pixels into patterns. These patterns are recognized repeatedly. When the patterns re-occur over time, reason and cognition take over and assign a name in a particular language to that pattern. As that pattern gets recognized repeatedly by the prolepseis - the non-rational - it reinforces what name has been given to that pattern, thus reinforcing that pattern.
 - That said, the prolepseis works in babies, too, before language. They can begin to recognize patterns and discern the form of something - they can recognize animals and so on. They may call all four-legged animals a "doggy" for awhile, but over time their faculty of prolepseis discerns finer and finer patterns from the pixels registered by their sensations.

- And by pixels, I mean discrete units involved in the sensations. Pixels is probably the closest analogy to sight. But smells would be the individual units of molecules or smells. If we recognize a particular pattern in a smell over time we can begin to recognize this as distinct then we will eventually assign "cinnamon" or "skunk!" to a pattern of a smell. Same way with sound waves sensed by our ears. The sensation of touch leading to a pattern we finally recognize as "soft" "fluffy" "scratchy" even before we can assign a name to it.
- The prolepsis can also recognize patterns of behavior, as in a prolepsis of "justice." I maintain this is the innate sense of fairness that is tested in babies and toddlers. They recognize a pattern of behavior - equity in the number of cookies, etc. - and what we would call a prolepsis of "justice/fairness" is recognized. Note that the babies are NOT assigning words yet, they can't. They don't have the capacity for language. But the pattern is recognized, will be reinforced, and will eventually be given a name/word by the language of the baby's parents and culture.
- I'm still working on the prolepsis of the gods - of divinity - BUT I think it has something to do with the innate ability to recognize awe and wonder - to be in awe, to be amazed, to be transfixed in wonder.

I'm certainly not saying I have this all figured out. FAR from it. This is where my head is at right now... but I could change my mind before Sunday, too!

CASSIUS:

That appears to me to be very close to what I am reading from Glidden and it is also not far from Dewitts position. I think it differs significantly from Sedley and I am confident it differs totally from Bailey. I can't recall where Tsouna comes down other than that I seem to recall she favors Laertius over Velleius.

So I think I agree with all your bullet points. We just need to be careful to point out that:

- this conclusion is Not easy to reach based on a simple reading of Laertius alone.
- ultimately too this gets wrapped up in whether an anticipation of gods is inscribed in all men at birth (Velleius) or whether it only occurs after receiving mental "images" after birth .

And we also need to stick with our pattern of following chapter 8 by using the book as the discussion guide, but that should be easy because Dewitt conducts the analysis the same way most everyone does.

CASSIUS:

"IF prolepsis are part of Canonic (criteria of truth), they have to be pre-rational, a faculty that isn't involved in concept-formation."

And yes that strikes me too as a very critical part - and it is an important part of Dewitts position too. Dewitt gets loose and occasionally uses the word idea but the essence of his

position is that it is prerational. I think we are likely to agree that a fully formed "idea" is never equivalent to "anticipation.". Ideas require formation in the mind after observation and thought (they don't come from a Platonic world) and anticipations must be something that go in at the start of the process before an idea is formed. It's a pre-idea, not an idea. It can't be a description of the process of taking an idea and matching it against new observations, which is what Laertius describes.

That is one reason I would really like to see Glidden's full article to see whether he specifically agrees with all or part of Dewitt - the short article does not mention sources.

No matter what else we stress about anticipations, this point of what it means to be canonic seems to me to be absolutely fundamental and something we are safe taking a position on.

And I don't think that Tsouna or maybe even Sedley honor it - they don't seem to be as bothered by the feedback loop that would be created as Glidden is and I think we are.

But I am not by any means on top of all the articles and that is the main reason I think there is lots we have to hedge on.

One more thing I would like to see us mention - I don't know where it is but I see reference to Epicurus saying that names are more precise than definitions - that it is better to say "there is Socrates" than to say "there is famous philosophy man and teacher of Plato etc etc etc."

That seems to me to be helpful in showing that Epicurus warned away from definition-obsession and that seems related to how real life isn't a process of constant definition-mongering.

I can see the possibility that Epicurus was saying that in real life we test the truth of opinions by comparing them first against patterns recognized / assembled prerationally, rather than by a syllogistic reasoning process of converting everything into words and constantly comparing things against definitions.

Thus the mind would have principles of operation that control how it processes patterns just like the eyes have principles of operation that control how it processes light. The eyes don't tell us what we are seeing and neither do anticipations give us fully formed ideas. Both are inputs and not conclusory opinions.