

Episode 166 - The Lucretius Today Podcast Interviews Dr. David Glidden on "Epicurean Prolepsis"

Post by "Cassius" of March 24, 2023 at 4:40 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

I really liked Dr. Glidden's "sensations are true*to their cause*."

[Quote from Don](#)

But sensations are just raw data. Light hitting our retinas. Vibrations in the air. Molecules on the breeze. And so on. Prolepseis allow the recognition of patterns to be pulled out of the chaos. A prolepsis is a particular pattern, initially vague then reinforced over time.

I agree with both of those, and I think that it is possible to use the same perspective that prolepsis is also "true to its cause." The eyes are not "perfect" in the sense of always being in total focus and always true to colors, (astigmatism). We take what the eyes report as we get it not because what the eyes report are perfect renderings, but because we have no other tool for vision.

I think the same can be said for non-cognitive prolepsis. The patterns being recognized are not being constructed cognitively, they actually do exist in nature in the sense of repeated similar constructions of atoms and void. On a larger scale it is not because we say "cat" that cats exist as a type. In the face example you cited, it is not because we say "face" that regularly in nature we find that animals have faces - nature does that in reality regardless of whether we recognize it.

I would think that the ability to pick up repeated examples of formations or configurations in reality is analogizable to what the eyes and ears are doing. Those repetitions exist regardless and prior to our thinking about them consciously and naming them, and that picking up or noticing of patterns happens prior to and without our interpretation of them.

Or at least I am thinking that that is what Dr. Glidden is saying about how they work and are pre-cognitive. That's why DeWitt cautions against confusion due to the multiple meanings of "true" and "False."

'true to their cause' implies to me much what DeWitt is saying - they are repeating how they are stimulated, without opinion or interpretation. But they are not "true" in the sense of

interpreting how they are being stimulated. Using DeWitt's courtroom analogy, they are being reported "truly" in the sense of honestly repeating what they received, but they can easily be "false to the facts" if they are taken literally as explaining everything there is to know about the issue being witnessed. That's why we have to walk close to the tower and take multiple observations in order to see if it is square or round. And with prolepsis I would suggest the same - they might report to us a distorted (analogy to blurry or muffled) pattern at one moment while at another moment (presumably after some kind of closer examination) the pattern comes into sharper focus.

Again a possible analogy to optical character recognition - the computer is told the basic pattern of letters, but the document being input into the system at any one moment may be sharper or fuzzier depending on how good the "scan" is that the computer is trying to recognize. The pattern of the letters exists in nature (in the case of OCR because we tell it the pattern; in the case of the real world because in the nature of things there is regular behavior arising from properties of atoms and void) but the OCR engine sometimes fails to match the letter accurately because the document being scanned is blurry. The OCR engine is doing the best it can to recognize the letter, and it reports the closest match, but the pattern it reports can be "wrong" because the input is insufficiently focused. The OCR functioning is "true to its cause" but it is not "true to the fact" in that situation.

I see no problem with considering the pattern matching to be sometimes sharp, sometimes blurry, just like data from eyes and ears. The pattern-matching is also "true to its cause" all the way through - it is our interpretation of the pattern in our minds where we commit error or confirm the pattern interpretation with accuracy.

Something like that would seem to me to be the logical way to express this, and would render it consistent with the other two legs of the "canon."