

A Discussion On Anticipations from 2017

Post by "Cassius" of April 13, 2019 at 11:48 PM

The following notes were from a discussion in 2017 among several of our core members. The discussion was prompted when we were talking about trying to come to a summary position on the nature of anticipations, which proved to be something we had to defer. The discussion was also in part influenced by the Voula Tsouna article "Epicurean Preconceptions."

To illustrate the anti-DeWitt position, I am going to post separately in the files section the chapter from Bailey's "Greek Atomists and Epicurus" on Canonics, which includes Anticipations.

I always cite Bailey with hesitation because I frequently find his interpretations unconvincing, and he is clearly not sympathetic to Epicurus or try to interpret Epicurus in a favorable light. He is in my view the opposite of DeWitt. So while I strongly trust DeWitt due to his lifetime of work and research in support of Epicurus, it is possible that DeWitt gets certain interpretations wrong. And while I strongly distrust Bailey, due to his constant stated disagreement with and deprecation of Epicurus' views, it is possible that he gets particular interpretations correct. Here is the Bailey / Majority view of anticipations:

"According to Epicurean psychology the act of perception in the sense-organ stirs the particles of 'soul' in its neighbourhood and they communicate the movement to other soul-particles and so on till the movement reaches the mind (which is situated in the breast), and there creates a representation of the sense-image. The mind then by a spontaneous movement, akin to the act of attention on the part of the senses, compares the new image with previously existing general conceptions and pronounces that 'this is, or is not, so-and-so'. Just as without cognition mere sensation is valueless, so the individual image is without significance apart from the general concept: apart from the general concept no one can inquire or feel doubt or even hold an opinion, no, nor refute one'. So far Epicurus' position does not seem to be peculiar: the acceptance of cognition as a necessary element in perception, and the admission of the impossibility of classification or even recognition without general conceptions are practically universal. It is necessary to ask how Epicurus conceived his general concepts, what was their origin and what their validity.

To return for a moment to psychology, the 'mind-image' aroused by the movements of the soul-particles started in their turn by the sensational motions of the sense-organs, does not immediately perish, but remains stored up in the mind, and may be, as it were, 'called up' for subsequent contemplation. Thus an act of memory is the momentary attention of the mind to an 'image' so preserved in itself, and a mental comparison is the apprehension by the mind of two or more such images side by side. But this is not all, for when as the result of many individual perceptions of objects of the same class, a series of similar images, is, as it were, heaped one upon another in the mind, the result is a kind of 'composite photograph' of the

genus or species: the dissimilarities of the individual images have disappeared, and that which is common to all is retained in what is in fact a 'general concept'. The combined 'images' of many horses, seen in sense-perception, has created in the mind the 'general concept' of 'horse'.

To this 'general concept' Epicurus gives the name of 'anticipation': it is that which we have permanently in our mind to enable us to anticipate the general appearance of anything for which we are looking or wish to create, and to identify and distinguish the individual images of sense-perception when they are presented to us. 'Anticipations' then take their place as the second criterion of truth. They owe their validity to the fact that, although they are not themselves directly sensations, they are immediately built up of sensations: our 'anticipation' of horse is simply the aggregate--or perhaps one should rather say the average--of a number of individual sensations of horses. The 'anticipation' is not itself 'true' for it does not correspond to or issue from any one external existence, but it is a 'clear vision' and as such a test of truth: that which is the common element in a number of 'images' of 'horse' must itself constitute a clear general 'image' of 'horse', and to it may be referred as a certain test the subsequent 'images' presented to us in sense-perception.

This account of the 'anticipations' is not to be found explicitly stated in any Epicurean source, but it is generally adopted by modern writers, and is strongly supported by such testimony as is available.....

And here is Bailey stating the inevitable result of holding that anticipations are "concepts" - "the concepts are themselves infallible as tests of truth just as are individual sensations." So the concept of "capitalism" or "socialism" is just as infallible as a test of truth as your seeing and touching and tasting an ice cream cone and finding it pleasurable (???)

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