

A Discussion On Anticipations from 2017

Post by "Cassius" of April 14, 2019 at 12:00 AM

Glancing back at the state of the summary of the canon, my current thought is that it is no so important to take a detailed position on how anticipations operate, and the main thing is noting (as I think we do) that preconceptions are an innate faculty for the forming of conceptions. The question of *how* conceptions are formed can be left to another day so long as the general statement doesn't imply that reason is used to form them.

However I think the current version needs a brief passage added to emphasize the role of pain and pleasure. The point of emphasis in Torquatus is that Nature herself is the judge of what is and is not contrary to Nature, and that the only faculty given us by Nature to judge that which is desirable and undesirable in itself is the faculty of pleasure and pain.

As long as we emphasize like Torquatus that pleasure is the only faculty given us for knowing what is desirable in itself,. then we cut off any implication that anticipations or cognitive reasoning could be used to justify a different or superior goal to that of living pleasurably.

Here's the section from Torquatus:

"This he sets out to prove as follows: Every animal, as soon as it is born, seeks for pleasure, and delights in it as the Chief Good, while it recoils from pain as the Chief Evil, and so far as possible avoids it. This it does as long as it remains unperverted, and at the prompting of Nature's own unbiased and honest verdict. Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. These facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, as that fire is hot, snow is white, honey is sweet. None of these things need be proved by elaborate argument -- it is enough merely to draw attention to them. For there is a difference, he holds, between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder. The former is the method for discovering abstruse and recondite truths, the latter for indicating facts that are obvious and evident."

"Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains. It follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature. What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance?"

"Some members of our school however would refine upon this doctrine. These say that it is not enough for the judgment of good and evil to rest with the senses. The facts that pleasure is in and for itself desirable and pain in and for itself to be avoided can also be grasped by the intellect and the reason. Accordingly, they declare that the perception that the one is to be sought after and the other avoided is a natural and innate idea of the mind. Others again, with whom I agree, observing that a great many philosophers advance a vast array of reasons to prove why pleasure should not be counted as a good nor pain as an evil, consider that we had

better not be too confident of our case. In their view, it requires elaborate and reasoned argument, and abstruse theoretical discussion of the nature of pleasure and pain.

Here's an effort to emphasize the role of pleasure and to generalize on anticipations

Canon: the Standard of Truth

The entire system of Epicurean philosophy is based on the study of nature. Taken together, our connections with nature are referred to as the Canon of Truth, which is the "measure" or "test" of those opinions which we hold to be true. Epicurus identified three categories of human faculties which comprise the way in which we measure truth: (1) the "five senses" (the faculties by which we perceive sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell), (2) the "anticipations" (a mental faculty by which we process abstractions), and (3) the "feelings" (the faculty by which we perceive pleasure and pain). In setting out his Canon, Epicurus was reacting against the Skeptics, who denied that it was possible for humans to have clear knowledge about the world around us, and the Platonists, who held that logic is the pathway to a divine and absolute truth that governs all humanity at all times and all places.

While other schools deny that truth is knowable by ordinary humans, we reject that view and hold that humans can have confidence in their conclusions by referring to the proper standard for establishing something as true. This is the role of the Epicurean Canon of Truth - by it we recognize that our natural faculties are the fundamental touchstone on which we make judgments as to what is and is not true. The Canon is sometimes compared to a tripod, because its three legs provide a steady foundation on which we make all judgments about what is true and what is false.

It is important to see that the faculties of the Canon are *pre-cognitive.* The faculties of the Canon report to us their perceptions, and it is up to our minds to organize this raw data into opinions that we can consider to be true or false. Each natural faculty has unique jurisdiction over its particular aspect of nature; each is a direct contact with reality that reports to us raw and unprocessed information. Only eyes can see. Only ears can hear. Only the faculty of pleasure and pain can inform us what to choose and what to avoid. Only the faculty of anticipations can allow us to form and work with concepts in a way consistent with human nature. In this role as witnesses, the faculties of the canon work together to provide data. On the foundation of that data our minds then weigh and balance this information, comparing data from multiple observations and under varying conditions, and from the resulting data we assemble those observations into conclusions. Through this process of gathering data and testing our opinions against that data, we are enabled by Nature to have confidence that our judgments are consistent with reality.

The Epicurean Canon has many profound implications. Among the most important is that the Canon establishes Nature, and not "Reason," as the ultimate standard and authority for truth.

Nature herself is the judge of what is and is not contrary to Nature, and the only faculty given us by Nature to judge that which is desirable and undesirable in itself is the faculty of pleasure and pain. Thus wisdom through true reasoning is the process of properly processing the information provided by the Canon to achieve pleasurable living. Reason is used in the service of pleasurable living to decide when to forgo certain pleasures or to choose certain pains, but always toward the single goal of living pleurably. Abstractions and opinions about ethical issues are not direct contacts with reality, and in order to be considered to be true must always be tested against Nature's goal for life - living pleurably.

Another profound implication is that the Canon emancipates us from arbitrary authorities. A famous example of this was the Epicurean defiance of conventional notions of the role of women and slaves, who were treated as intellectual equals in the Garden of Epicurus. In their search for truth the Epicureans do not look to priests, to mediators, to divine revelation, or to experts in logic, but to the faculties provided by Nature. Thus Epicureans study how these faculties operate, how the data they provide can sometimes be distorted, and how those distortions can be corrected. Only by grounding all our opinions and our choices in the data provided by the Canon of Truth can we live happily and in accordance with nature.