

Episode Fifty-Eight - The Mind's Direct Receipt of Images

Post by “Julia” of May 19, 2024 at 11:17 AM

Quote from Lucretius in Book Four, Browne 1743 edition, section leading up to Latin Line 906

And now attend, and you shall know how it is that we are able to walk when we will, that we have a power to move our limbs as we please, and what it is that thrusts the body forward with all its weight. I say then, that the **images of motion first affect and strike the mind**, as we observed before. **This makes the Will, for we never attempt to do any thing before the mind knows what it is we desire to do**, and the image of that thing which occurs to the mind must be present before it. **And thus the mind, having moved itself so as to resolve to go forward, strikes immediately upon the soul, which is diffused through the whole body**, and this is easily done, because they are both closely joined together. **The soul then strikes the body, and so the whole bulk by degrees is thrust forward and put into motion**. Besides, the body by this means is rarefied, and the air, which is ever disposed to move, enters the open passages, and pierces through the pores in great abundance, and so is dispersed through every minute part of the body. By these two therefore (by the soul laboring within, and by the air entering from without) the body is moved, as a ship is by oars and wind. Nor is this at all strange, that particles so very small should turn about the bulk of our bodies, and move so great a weight; for the driving wind, formed of so fine and subtle seeds, thrust forward a large ship with mighty force, and one hand can govern it under full sail, by turning one little helm which way it pleases; and an engine with small labor is able, by pulleys and wheels, to move many bodies of a great weight.

In response to this, Elayne said:

Quote from Elayne in Episode 059, starting 12:32 (cleaned transcription, eg no particles and markers (no “ahem”, ...)):

Because Lucretius had to give an explanation for imagination – dreams, “How do we come with that stuff that's not actually in front of us?” – and he said that it was because **there were images that we weren't seeing with our eyes**, but were penetrating through the skin, **and we were perceiving them with our mind, rather than the brain itself being creative**. So it does make sense that, if you thought that, you would not think that you could imagine a motivation to move: How would you

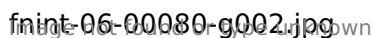
know how you wanted to move, in his model, if you weren't presented with an image beforehand, because you're not... — last week we talked about the memory being more of like a pattern, storing not an actual image. He doesn't have that in his model at all, so this has got to come from outside! And so then we're surrounded by all these images of moving, that I guess **the mind would decide to focus on something moving, and that would give it an understanding of what to do, and then it would decide to move!** – Really, really fascinating idea. Not how it works, but cool.

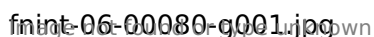
What Lucretius describes *casually* as a mental phenomenon seems *unusual* to Elayne, and indeed would to most present-day people. However, I am not aware of any of Lucretius' contemporaries taking offense *at the phenomenon* he describes – only *the explanation of it* was disputed.

The explanation of floating images – however wrong from today's perspective – should be credited for, at the time, being less-wrong than supernatural alternatives. Within the Epicurean physics, the explanation seems logical, natural, and standing-to-reason. Let's compare it with the “columns of air” which pass through the eyeball and allows us to tell how far away things are – how weird is that from our perspective?! Yet, it didn't bring about much controversy, because it fits well within the Epicurean physics. In the same way, this explanation fits. It shouldn't raise any eyebrow. It isn't the *explanation* that causes the feeling that “something is going on in this passage”, it is the *mental phenomenon* that causes this.

In the quotes above, I have highlighted the inner mental processes, and left out the underlying explanation. *If you read only the highlighted text in both statements, you end up reading a perfect description of one aspect – that of physical movement – in what we today would call dissociative humans.* There is not a thing that's odd or wrong about it, except, of course, Lucretius' explanation for it – and the fact that most present-day humans do not have this experience anymore.

I'm not in the mood to manually, bit by bit dissect the entire extant writings from Homer's pre-Socratic society to the post-Roman not-yet-dark-ages society in this manner. However, I have yet to come across a single passage which makes me question my assertion, what I said here is entirely in line with the numeric, empirical evidence offered by the team Mariano Sigman (the guy from the TED talk) published with,[1] and I am not currently aware of any substantiated contradictions...





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So I concur with Elayne, when she says:

Quote from Episode 059, starting 24:55, cleaned transcription

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1882-episode-fifty-eight-the-mind-s-direct-receipt-of-images/?postID=30496#post30496>

Cassius: "What is a thought then?"

Elayne: "[Lucretius] is separating it in a way that is real hard for us to imagine, but I guess it would be... [...] He apparently thought about how the brain works very, very differently from either how we experience it or how we are able to understand it currently. It's really, really different. And I don't think we should gloss over the rather extreme differences in that model, just to try to squeeze him into what we have now. That is a real difference."

and I'd stress it is important to not get distracted by Lucretius' outdated explanations and instead appreciate the qualitative difference of the inner experiences he is describing from the experiences common to most people today, and to appreciate how much he takes for granted that his audience shares his experiences qualitatively.

[1] Original Research: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnint.2012.00080>