

Episode 227 - Cicero's OTNOTG - 02 - Velleius Begins His Attack On Traditional Views Of The Gods

Post by "Cassius" of June 9, 2024 at 10:58 PM

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

So the chief option would be that it's part of our biological nature/cognitive architecture to categorize the world in a particular way or arrive at a particular conclusion in light of experience. We would be pre-disposed to eventually conclude, 'there must be gods,' or 'justice must be about entering agreements to avoid harm.'

Since Bryan quoted that I would suggest some possible tweaking, along the lines of:

So the chief option would be that it's part of our biological nature/cognitive architecture to categorize the world in a particular way, *and thereby we are disposed to form conclusions about those categories in the light of experience*. We would be pre-disposed more to something like sensing that, 'the subject of the best form of existence is important enough to us to become alert to under a particular name such as 'divinity,'" or 'the subject of our relationships with others is important enough to become alert to under a particular name such as "justice."

That sounds more to me like a "faculty" (which is what i gather "prolepsis" or "anticipations" must be, in order to be one of the three legs of the canon as a means of perception. Given its equivalence to the five senses or the feelings of pain and pleasure, we have to accept the workings of prolepsis as part of our makeup, and constructed "honestly" like pleasure and pain and the five senses, which do not inject their own opinions. The workings of the prolepsis faculty would then become "perceptions" combined in our minds with all other perceptions of the other faculties, and there processed to eventually form ideas.

So specific conclusions such as "there must be gods" or "it is good to enter into agreements with my particular neighbors to avoid harm" would to me be outside of the prolepsis process. Those would be "conclusions" that are part of the functioning of the mind, which turns all the inputs into ideas. So if we keep the focus on the view that it's in the mind that errors can happen, then we recognize the possibility of error in subjects where prolepsis is involved. We can make the mistake of concluding that "the gods must be supernatural," or "as Hatfield I should treat all my neighbors the same, even if they are McCoys and are dying to kill me," because even though those involve divinity and justice, prolepsis doesn't deliver to us "conclusions" or "ideas" but just the disposition to recognize the issues and process them in the mind -- where right or wrong conclusions get made.

Under this perspective it would be wrong to ever consider "a prolepsis" to be an idea or a conclusion of any kind. That's where I think we implement Epicurus' observation that the opinions of the hoi polloi about the gods are not true, and are indeed false, even though they are about a subject in which prolepsis is involved. The prolepsis would dispose us to evaluate the subject and consider it important, but the prolepsis would not provide the correct conclusion -- conclusions occur only in the mind.

The input provided by the faculty of prolepsis would never be any more right or wrong than the input from your eye or your ear is right or wrong - it is what it is, and has to be taken as canonical, but it's not an idea or a conclusion. It's the tool we use to make contact with reality and then from that form ideas and conclusions in our mind. But the distinction between the two is sharp, and it's the same distinction I think Jackson Barwis makes so well in pointing out the flaw in Locke's empiricism.

"When we are told that benevolence is pleasing; that malevolence is painful; we are not convinced of these truths by reasoning, nor by forming them into propositions: but by an appeal to the innate internal affections of our souls: and if on such an appeal, we could not feel within the sentiment of benevolence, and the peculiar pleasure attending it; and that of malevolence and its concomitant pain, not all the reasoning in the world could ever make us sensible of them, or enable us to understand their nature."

In analogy to eyes enabling us to see light and ears enabling us to hear sound, I would paraphrase Barwis and see prolepsis as the human faculty that "*makes us sensible to [divinity and justice] and enables us to understand their nature* -- without which we would neither be sensible to or have the capacity to form any understanding about them.

And this is the point in the argument of analogizing prolepsis to a "sense" where I quote Thomas Jefferson to Peter Carr, **August 10, 1787**:

Moral Philosophy. I think it lost time to attend lectures on this branch. He who made us would have been a pitiful bungler, if he had made the rules of our moral conduct a matter of science. For one man of science, there are thousands who are not. What would have become of them? Man was destined for society. His morality, therefore, was to be formed to this object. He was endowed with a sense of right and wrong, merely relative to this. This sense is as much a part of his Nature, as the sense of hearing, seeing, feeling; it is the true foundation of morality, and not the [beautiful], truth, &c., as fanciful writers have imagined. The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as his leg or arm. It is given to all human beings in a stronger or weaker degree, as force of members is given them in a greater or less degree. It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body. This sense is submitted, indeed, in some degree, to the guidance of reason; but it is a small stock which is required for this: even a less one than what we call common sense. State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, & often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules. In this branch, therefore, read good books, because they will encourage, as well as direct your feelings.