

Ben's personal outline of Epicurean philosophy

Post by "Cassius" of May 15, 2019 at 1:15 PM

We're pretty much at this point stating positions before getting into details, so here's another "position" that I think is deeply involved in this -- and that is the "blank slate" position that I gather Aristotle took..

Another issue that has to be resolved is what to make of Diogenes Laertius' description of Anticipations:

"By preconception they mean a sort of apprehension or a right opinion or notion, or universal idea stored in the mind; that is, a recollection of an external object often presented, e.g. Such and such a thing is a man: for no sooner is the word "man" uttered than we think of his shape by an act of preconception, in which the senses take the lead. Thus, the object primarily denoted by every term is then plain and clear. And we should never have started an investigation, unless we had known what it was that we were in search of. For example: The object standing yonder is a horse or a cow. Before making this judgment, we must at some time or other have known by preconception the shape of a horse or a cow. We should not have given anything a name, if we had not first learnt its form by way of preconception. It follows, then, that preconceptions are clear. The object of a judgment is derived from something previously clear, by reference to which we frame the proposition, e.g. "How do we know that this is a man?" Opinion they also call conception or assumption, and declare it to be true and false; for it is true if it is subsequently confirmed or if it is not contradicted by evidence, and false if it is not subsequently confirmed or is contradicted by evidence. Hence the introduction of the phrase, "that which awaits" confirmation, e.g. to wait and get close to the tower and then learn what it looks like at close quarters."

This description has to mean something, even if we follow the DeWitt view.

In my view, this description by Diogenes Laertius is a description of the process of "conceptual reasoning." We gather input, we form an "idea" in our mind, and we store it and pull it out in the future where applicable.

I do not think that this process is what Epicurus would have considered to be a PREconception, or an anticipation. I think that we are talking about two separate things (1) conceptual reasoning, which we all understand to be the process of forming and using ideas, and (2) a faculty that disposes us to organize observations in particular ways, resulting in ideas later, but more akin to "feelings" about the idea, and separate from the idea itself. In other words, I may not be able to describe a situation in words as being just or unjust, but as I gather observations about a situation I begin to organize them "subconsciously" at which point I am already aware

of feelings about what I am organizing. And my mind in processing these inputs is processing them along pathways that are set in motion innately, just as my eyes process light in ways that are innately determined by the makeup of my eyes.

In my view, the DeWitt position is strongly rejected by people like Bailey and most modern academics because they accept the Aristotelian blank slate, and they consider "reason" and "logic" to be the important thing about the human mind-- so they identify preconceptions with the art of conceptual reasoning.

But it is clear that Epicurus did not hold "reason" and "logic" in the same esteem that these others hold it, and so it seems very likely to me that Epicurus held a view of preconceptions which don't fit into the Socratic/Platonic/Aristotelian paradigm.