

# Feedback From A User

Post by "Cassius" of January 18, 2020 at 4:10 AM

Lee:

Not sure I can "explain" anything but I can certainly try to give me current understanding from my reading:

## [Quote from JLR](#)

It reminds me of the amazing experience of watching my newborn son search out his mother's breast and begin to nurse only minutes after being born. I remember thinking how astonishing it was that nature had clearly endowed him with knowledge before he had even seen the world beyond the womb!

I would be very interested in comments from [Elayne](#) on this, as she is a pediatrician. Is it a matter of smell or touch or some other sensation?

## [Quote from JLR](#)

I was always a bit uncomfortable with the apparent circularity in Aristotle's arguments that what appears good is that which we desire and that we naturally desire what is good. Pleasure and pain seem to be the essential natural guides (or telos) that provide the way to really determine the ultimate good.

I completely agree - it is embarrassingly circular, and to that I would add that I think the "golden mean" analysis is embarrassingly devoid of substance! 😊

## [Quote from JLR](#)

I find myself understanding these anticipatory "concepts" or "ideas" as having some sort of real existence- even if only in the mind.

1. If what we are talking about is a faculty of anticipations with which we are born, I definitely think you are correct to use scare quotes around those words, as I think it is probably bright line unacceptable to believe that we are born with fully-formed concepts of ideas in the way those words are generally used. I believe the "blank slate" is wrong to assert that we are born essentially with nothing, but I don't think it is tenable to assert that we are born with anything requiring words or definitions, which is probably a requirement of the words concepts or ideas. That's why I like the word "preconceptions" almost better than "Anticipations," since this emphasizes that what we are talking about is something that precedes a concept, not

something that IS a concept or is some kind of application of a concept.

2. As for "real existence" that's a hard one too, since that term implies materiality, and everything that goes on in the mind is ultimately traceable, or ultimately based on, things that are material "atoms." I think what we are probably talking about here are "qualities" of combinations of atoms, rather than "properties" of the atoms themselves, or as some people say "emergent properties" or "emergent qualities." This would be similar to the observation that the atoms themselves do not have color, but when combined into bodies, bodies have color and many other qualities that did not exist in the atoms standing alone.

#### [Quote from JLR](#)

. I continue to wonder if they are immaterial.

I think this is the issue of "emergent qualities" that I just mentioned. Emergent qualities are not any less "real" because they arise from combinations of atoms rather than being a property of individual atoms at the atomic level.

#### [Quote from JLR](#)

Can you explain this existence any further?

How much of Lucretius have you read? There are some really interesting sections that bear on these issues, one of which that comes to mind is the reference to Helen of Troy around line 420. Here Lucretius/Epicurus is saying that "Bondage, Liberty, Riches, Poverty, War, Concord, or the like," are "events" of atoms (a word I think is much more accurate than "accidents") rather than "essential conjuncts" (properties) of atoms. The point that I think is important to realize is that "Bondage, Liberty, Riches, Poverty, War, Concord, or the like," are not any less real to us because they are not properties of the atoms themselves. It's at the "body/combination" level that we experience life, which is what is ultimately important to us, and it should not be a problem for us to understand how the two levels interrelate. The reason I think it IS a problem for most of us is our corruption through religion that we have become acclimated to believe that nothing is really important unless it has some kind of stamp of "divine eternal god-given existence" which is a totally false and nonsensical frame of analysis:

*[420] All nature therefore, in itself considered, is one of these, is body or is space, in which all things are placed, and from which the various motions of all beings spring. That there is body common sense will show, this as a fundamental truth must be allowed, or there is nothing we can fix as certain in our pursuit of hidden things, by which to find the Truth, or prove it when 'tis found. Then if there were no place or space, we call it void, bodies would have no where to be, nor could they move at all, as we have fully proved to you before.*

[431] Besides, there is nothing you can strictly say, "It is neither body nor void," which you may call a third degree of things distinct from these. For every being must in quantity be more or less; and if it can be touched, though ne'er so small or light, it must be body, and so esteemed; but if it can't be touched, and has not in itself a power to stop the course of other bodies as they pass, this is the void we call an empty space.

[439] Again, whatever is must either act itself, or be by other agents acted on; or must be something in which other bodies must have a place and move; but nothing without body can act, or be acted on; and where can this be done, but in a vacuum or empty space? Therefore, beside what body is or space, no third degree in nature can be found, nothing that ever can affect our sense, or by the power of thought can be conceived. All other things you'll find essential conjuncts, or else the events or accidents of these. I call essential conjunct what's so joined to a thing that it cannot, without fatal violence, be forced or parted from it; is weight to stones, to fire heat, moisture to the Sea, touch to all bodies, and not to be touched essential is to void. But, on the contrary, Bondage, Liberty, Riches, Poverty, War, Concord, or the like, which not affect the nature of the thing, but when they come or go, the thing remains entire; these, as it is fit we should, we call Events.

[460] Time likewise of itself is nothing; our sense collects from things themselves what has been done long since, the thing that present is, and what's to come. For no one, we must own, ever thought of Time distinct from things in motion or at rest.

[465] For when the poets sing of Helen's rape, or of the Trojan State subdued by war, we must not say that these things do exist now in themselves, since Time, irrevocably past, has long since swept away that race of men that were the cause of those events; for every act is either properly the event of things, or of the places where those things are done.

[472] Further, if things were not of matter formed, were there no place or space where things might act, the fire that burned in Paris' heart, blown up by love of Helen's beauty, had never raised the famous contests of a cruel war; nor had the wooden horse set Troy on fire, discharging from his belly in the night the armed Greeks: from whence you plainly see that actions do not of themselves subsist, as bodies do, nor are in nature such as is a void, but rather are more justly called the events of body, and of space, where things are carried on.

I stumbled over this section for a long time as something that made little sense to me, and of course I am sure that my understanding of this now is still far from complete. But I think that the point of arguing that the rape of Helen / Trojan war "do not exist now in themselves" is essentially to point out that they are no longer "real" in the sense of existing in some eternal plane of existence like you (Lee) are talking about.

I used to wonder if this was related to our modern Idea that the Trojan War might have been "myth" and didn't really happen, but now I think the OPPOSITE. I think Lucretius was citing this founding story of Rome as something that was immensely important to the Romans, as something essential to their understanding of themselves, that was nevertheless not "real" in

the sense of existing currently as atoms or bodies that could be touched. I think that Lucretius was pointing out to a Roman / to the Romans that the story of the Trojan War, which was of immense "real" importance to them, was important without being something that was "real" in another (Platonic? Religious Heavenly?) dimension. He was pointing out that despite its importance the Trojan war did not possess eternal bodily existence, a fact that we should not be disillusioned by, in the way we are trained by religion to feel disappointed, or to feel nihilistically defeated, when we realize that this "eternal existence" is not really so.)