

"Choice" and "Avoidance"

Post by "Cassius" of March 24, 2020 at 7:53 PM

Good way of asking the question. Well I think in answering that we have to consider this PD:

16. In but few things chance hinders a wise man, but the greatest and most important matters, reason has ordained, and throughout the whole period of life does and will ordain.

And as I understand it there are multiple / many references in Lucretius to "true reason."

So we are in no way at war with "reason" -- we are at war with TYPES of reason, and/or versions of abstract logic, which deprecate connections to the senses by saying that their results cannot be tested by the senses, or which are "true" despite what the senses can ever confirm. (And when we say senses we are also talking about observations of consequences, like wind against our skin, that we can observe either directly or with instruments, even though we cannot observe the thing itself.

So I think Epicurus makes clear that reason of a certain type is critical -- would that not be prudence too? And of course this is why DeWitt goes on and on about how ridiculous it is to consider Epicurus to be a strict empiricist, when so much of his philosophy is based on DEDUCTIVE reasoning.

The best extended discussion of this argument is probably the Torquatus dialogue, but we can never forget this too from Book Four:

[\(1743 version\):](#)

Many more things of this kind we observe and wonder at, which attempt to overthrow the certainty of our senses, but to no purpose - for things of this sort generally deceive us upon account of the judgment of the mind which we apply to them, and so we conclude we see things which we really do not; for nothing is more difficult than to distinguish things clear and plain from such as are doubtful, to which the mind is ready to add its assent, as it is inclined to believe everything imparted by the senses.

Lastly, if anyone thinks that he knows nothing, he cannot be sure that he knows this, when he confesses that he knows nothing at all. I shall avoid disputing with such a trifler, who perverts all things, and like a tumbler with his head prone to the earth, can go no otherwise than backwards.

And yet allow that he knows this, I would ask (since he had nothing before, to lead him into such a knowledge) from whence he had the notion what it was to know, or not to know; what was it that gave him an idea of Truth or Falsehood, and what taught him to distinguish between doubt and certainty?

You will find that knowledge of truth is originally derived from the senses, nor can the senses be contradicted, for whatever is able by the evidence of an opposite truth to convince the senses of falsehood, must be something of greater certainty than they. But what can deserve greater credit than the senses require from us? Will reason, derived from erring sense, claim the privilege to contradict it? Reason – that depends wholly upon the senses, which unless you allow to be true, all reason must be false. Can the ears correct the eyes? Or the touch the ears? Or will taste confute the touch? Or shall the nose or eyes convince the rest?

This, I think, cannot be, for every sense has a separate faculty of its own, each has its distinct powers; and therefore an object, soft or hard, hot or cold, must necessarily be distinguished as soft or hard, hot or cold, by one sense separately, that is, the touch. It is the sole province of another, the sight, to perceive the colors of things, and the several properties that belong to them. The taste has a distinct office. Odors particularly affect the smell, and sound the ears. And therefore it cannot be that one sense should correct another, nor can the same sense correct itself, since an equal credit ought to be given to each; and therefore whatever the senses at any time discover to us must be certain.

And though reason is not able to assign a cause why an object that is really four-square when near, should appear round when seen at a distance; yet, if we cannot explain this difficulty, it is better to give any solution, even a false one, than to deliver up all Certainty out of our power, to break in upon our first principle of belief, and tear up all foundations upon which our life and security depend. For not only all reason must be overthrown, but life itself must be immediately extinguished, unless you give credit to your senses. These direct you to fly from a precipice and other evils of this sort which are to be avoided, and to pursue what tends to your security. All therefore is nothing more than an empty parade of words that can be offered against the certainty of sense.

Lastly, as in a building, if the principle rule of the artificer be not true, if his line be not exact, or his level bear in to the least to either side, every thing must needs be wrong and crooked, the whole fabric must be ill-shaped, declining, hanging over, leaning and irregular, so that some parts will seem ready to fall and tumble down, because the whole was at first disordered by false principles. So the reason of things must of necessity be wrong and false which is founded upon a false representation of the senses.