

Starting Discussion of "Free Will"

Post by "Cassius" of January 29, 2018 at 8:41 PM

An excellent catch Maciej! The entire topic of "images" gets far too little attention in our online discussions, and it definitely relates to "free will." I think somewhere (maybe more than one place) Cicero ridicules the Epicurean treatment of images. Found one here:

CICERO TO C. CASSIUS LONGINUS (AT BRUNDISIUM), January 45 BC

I think you must be a little ashamed at this being the third letter inflicted on you before I have a page or a syllable from you. But I will not press you: I shall expect, or rather exact, a longer letter. For my part, if I had a messenger always at hand, I should write even three an hour. For somehow it makes you seem almost present when I write anything to you, and that not "by way of phantoms of images," as your new friends express it, who hold that "mental pictures" are caused by what Catius called "spectres"—for I must remind you that Catius Insuber the Epicurean, lately dead, calls "spectres" what the famous Gargettius, and before him Democritus, used to call "images."

Well, even if my eyes were capable of being struck by these "spectres," because they spontaneously run in upon them at your will, I do not see how the mind can be struck. You will be obliged to explain it to me, when you return safe and sound, whether the "spectre" of you is at my command, so as to occur to me as soon as I have taken the fancy to think about you; and not only about you, who are in my heart's core, but supposing I begin thinking about the island of Britain—will its image fly at once into my mind? But of this later on.

Maciej do you have an opinion on what Epicurus was saying about free will here? (Bailey translation):

"He understands that the limit of good things is easy to fulfil and easy to attain, whereas the course of ills is either short in time or slight in pain; he laughs at (destiny), whom some have introduced as the mistress of all things. (He thinks that with us lies the chief power in determining events, some of which happen by necessity) and some by chance, and some are within our control; for while necessity cannot be called to account, he sees that chance is inconstant, but that which is in our control is subject to no master, and to it are naturally attached praise and blame. For, indeed, it were better to follow the myths about the gods than to become a slave to the destiny of the natural philosophers: for the former suggests a hope of

placating the gods by worship, whereas the latter involves a necessity which knows no placation. As to chance, he does not regard it as a god as most men do (for in a god's acts there is no disorder), nor as an uncertain cause (of all things) for he does not believe that good and evil are given by chance to man for the framing of a blessed life, but that opportunities for great good and great evil are afforded by it. He therefore thinks it better to be unfortunate in reasonable action than to prosper in unreason. For it is better in a man's actions that what is well chosen (should fail, rather than that what is ill chosen) should be successful owing to chance."

Text is here: <https://archive.org/stream/Epicuru...ge/n89/mode/2up>