

References to Epicurus' Attitude Toward The "Place of the Sciences And Liberal Arts"

Post by "Don" of July 26, 2020 at 9:53 PM

[Epicurean Preconceptions.pdf](#)

I just found this article by Dr. Voula. It appears to have some good summaries of the current scholarship on the prolepses, and she gives her own take as well. I've only just begun reading, but a couple things jumped out so far including this list:

Quote

In the first place, an examination of early Epicurean texts intimates that the range of objects of which we have preconceptions includes: natural kinds, such as man, horse and cow; abstract entities, for instance justice, utility and truth; moral and psychological attitudes like responsibility and agency; and non-perceptible items, such as gods and atoms. Preconceptions of these objects always have an evidential basis. One acquires the preconception of cow through repeated clear impressions of cows, that of justice by perceiving many just acts, that of moral responsibility by being exposed to acts of praise and blame, and the prolepsis of atoms as constantly moving by observing corpuscula dancing in the light. However, the evidence makes it reasonably clear that only some of our concepts are preconceptions formed in the aforementioned way, while all other concepts are formed by internal mental processes in which the mind plays a role. 'All notions arise by means of confrontation, analogy, similarity and combination, with some contribution from reasoning as well' (DL 10.32).

The list is helpful, but I'm not sure I accept the conclusions. I find it interesting that she includes truth in the abstract concepts list! I'd like to know where that comes from in the texts to provide some context.

Prolepses are also described elsewhere as being innate, and, if they're innate, that seems to mean they are inborn. So, Tsouna's contention that they require multiple experiences doesn't seem to line up with that idea of innateness.

On the other hand, consider the acquiring of language by babies and toddlers (to look at the prolepses of language, e.g., cow, man, horse, etc.). My contention would be that as we are acquiring the words of our individual language (man, άνθρωπος, l'homme, etc.) we are attaching these to prolepses of the general meaning of man, car, house, tower, etc. These are NOT Platonic Forms but mental images we will immediately access when we again hear or read or imagine those concepts.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1561-references-to-epicurus-attitude-toward-the-place-of-the-sciences-and-liberal-art/?postID=8371#post8371>

But is this prolepses or simply memory? For me, the innateness and reflexive automatic pre-rational access of the prolepses would argue against this kind of formation of prolepses. I'm much more inclined to the instinctual, inborn faculties as being the prolepses.

I'll have to study the texts and the scholarship more, but this is where my head is at right now.