

# Episode Thirty-Three - More on The Implications of the Colorless Atoms

Post by "Cassius" of August 28, 2020 at 5:42 AM

This is one of the many areas where I think the explanation I gave is basically channeling what Dewitt had to say. No doubt one of the most controversial aspects of it is that it equates "feelings" with the five senses as faculties that work by reporting "honestly" (pre-rational; without "opinion") but I think that has to be the common thread of anything that is a "canon of truth" - something that we can look to for what is our ultimate reality. "Our" human ultimate reality is all that is relevant to us - "absolute" "universal" reality "from the perspective of God" is a false idea that has no basis in "fact." Probably in legal terms that's why we look to the "reasonable man" standard in court rather than to something like "what God would have done."

I suppose you would have to be careful about the meaning of the term "cognition" but it strikes me that at least in terms of common understanding, this would put Epicurus squarely at odds with the Ayn Rand slogan "Emotions are not tools of cognition" for example [here](#). (I think this is often restated among the Randians as "feelings are not tools of cognition.")

## A Conversation with Ayn Rand

"Emotions are not tools of cognition," Ayn Rand said on more than one occasion (1961, 55; 1964, 6; 1974, 6).

An emotion as such tells you nothing about reality, beyond the fact that something makes you feel something. Without a ruthlessly honest commitment to introspection—to the conceptual identification of your inner states—you will not discover what you feel, what arouses the feeling, and whether your feeling is an appropriate response to the facts of reality, or a mistaken response, or a vicious illusion produced by years of self-deception . . . (Rand 1984, 17)

The apparent meaning of these statements has reverberated among Objectivists for years. For some, they have cast a suspicion on emotion as such. Many take them to mean that feelings should always be ignored when reasoning. Why? On the premise that they do not give any evidence about reality, and distort our reasoning, giving a kind of positive bias (Kahneman, Slovic and Tversky 1982) to whatever is felt most strongly.

I can't leave the topic of "reporting honestly / pre-rational / without opinion" as the key aspect of a canonical faculty without going back to the issue of how that would apply to anticipations. It seems pretty clear that Epicurus was considering the process thinking to include the storing "mental pictures" which constitute our understanding of the meaning of words, and he was urging us to make those as clear as possible as an aid to proper thought. That would be the part that Diogenes Laertius described as:

(BAILEY uses "concept" here but the Greek is apparently prolepsis / preconcept / anticipation)

Quote

The concept they speak of as an apprehension or right opinion or thought or general idea stored within the mind, that is to say a recollection of what has often been presented from without, as for instance 'Such and such a thing is a man,' for the moment the word 'man' is spoken, immediately by means of the concept his form too is thought of, as the senses give us the information. Therefore the first signification of every name is immediate and clear evidence. And we could not look for the object of our search, unless we have first known it. For instance, we ask, 'Is that standing yonder a horse or a cow?' To do this we must know by means of a concept the shape of horse and of cow. Otherwise we could not have named them, unless we previously knew their appearance by means of a concept. So the concepts are clear and immediate evidence. Further, the decision of opinion depends on some previous clear and immediate evidence, to which we refer when we express it: for instance, 'How do we know whether this is a man?' Opinion they also call supposition, and say that it may be true or false: if it is confirmed or not contradicted, it is true ; if it is not confirmed or is contradicted, it is false. For this reason was introduced the notion of the problem awaiting confirmation: for example, waiting to come near the tower and see how it looks to the near view.

To me the best way to reconcile this is that the "first signification of every name" is a mental summary that INCLUDES the information we obtained from the 5 senses, and the feelings, and the preconceptions, but it's not identical with the preconception itself. This is where DeWitt i think is definitely on the right track, as considering preconceptions to be an automatic intuitive **pre**-concept input rather than a fully-formed "concept" or "word" or "mental picture" itself. Anticipations in that theory would be a faculty that provides organizing procedural functions, like the eyes assemble light waves and process what we call "sight" that then GOES IN to the final mental picture, but isn't the final mental picture itself. All the various sights and sounds and smells and tastes of birds that we have experienced in our lives GO INTO THE CREATION OF our stored mental image of "bird," but those experiences are not identical with our stored mental image of bird.

In the same way, all our various experiences (Feelings, Emotions) of loving our families, spouses, friends, artwork, etc GO INTO THE CREATION OF our stored mental image of "love" but are not equivalent to that stored mental image.

That's where anticipations can be "not true to all the facts" as referenced in the letter to Menoeceus where it appears to say that people have "wrong" conclusions about the gods, even though those conclusions are based in part on anticipations. The five senses/feelings/anticipations are not magical keys by which we are in touch with "absolute truth" -- but they are the only faculties we have for experiencing what is "true to us" and testing that truth over time to have confidence that our conclusions are repeatable over time and can be expected to recur over and over again reliably. Since there is no god, no universal point of reference, no "absolute" truth, then the only kind of "truth" that really exists consists of

repeatable test results over time.

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