

PD24 - Commentary and Translation of PD 24

Post by "Cassius" of September 3, 2020 at 12:05 PM

Well I am not sure I can go much further! 😊 I think we're seeing that Epicurus's response to issues of "skepticism" and "knowledge" was to focus on what those words meant and define as clearly as possible what it means to be "true" and "real" -- with the result that the rigorous conclusion is that "truth" for is what is or could be revealed to us through the canonical faculties. Asking for more than that --- asking for "certainty" -- implies a standard of proof that is impossible for a human being and is not even relevant to a human being in any way.

Within that kind of framework, what is "true" is what can be ascertained through the canonical faculties, and nothing else is or can be "true" or "real" to us.

As DeWitt says, Epicurus needed a standard of truth in the realm of relationships or abstractions - we need to go back and get his exact words - but I think that the problem arises when we say that the anticipations are standards of truth in the realm of "ideas." IDEAS are fully-formed concepts, and fully-formed concepts necessarily involved opinion and serve themselves as canonical "truth." Fully-formed ideas / concepts are highly useful and much to be appreciated, but they can never in themselves be considered "universal truths" that rise to the level of them always being true and real to individual humans.

Don in my mind this is where I always fall back to a passage from the 1770's book that I quote from by Jackson Barwis, his book against John Locke's argument against "innate ideas." Barwise defended not innate "ideas" but innate "principles of thinking." The book was entitled "Dialogue on Innate Principles." In that book (primarily chapter one of that book) Barwis argues that there is a huge distinction between innate IDEAS vs innate PRINCIPLES. Barwis argues that Locke and others are wrong to assert that there are innate *ideas*, but that there certainly are innate *principles of functioning* that go into ideas.

Here is the important section. Underlining is my emphasis Barwis is talking about innate "moral" principles here, but I think the point applies more widely to the issue of how "principles" are different from "ideas." I think the faculty of anticipations is dealing with the "principles" as discussed below, not with "ideas." We are not born with innate ideas, but we are born with a faculty that processes information in certain ways (according to certain principles):

When I take a general view of the arguments adduced by Mr. Locke against innate moral principles; and when I see what he produces, as the most indisputable innate principles, "if any be so," I am inclined to think there must have been some very great mistake as to the true

nature of the things in question: for he lays down certain propositions, (no matter whether moral or scientific, so they be but true) and then proves that such propositions, considered merely as propositions, formed by our rational faculty, after due consideration of things, as all true propositions must be, are not innate. Nothing more obvious! But surely those whom he opposes, must, or ought to have meant, (though I cannot say I have read their arguments, nor do I mean to answer for anyone but myself) not that the propositions themselves were innate, but, that the conscious internal sentiments, on which such moral propositions are founded, were innate.

He looked on me, interrogatively. I said it might be so, and that I saw a great difference in those things.

Or perhaps, continued he, the mistake may have arisen from following too closely the mode, in which it is necessary to proceed, in order to acquire a knowledge of certain sciences, as in geometry: that is, by laying down some clear and self-evident axioms, or rational propositions. But even here it should be remembered that, in the natures of things, there were principles which had existence anterior to the formation of these axioms or propositions, and on which they are founded, and on which they depend for their existence: as, extension and solidity.

-- I gave an assenting inclination of the head.

I cannot, therefore, conceive, added he, that what we ought to understand by innate moral principles, can by any means, when fairly explained, be imagined to bear any similitude to such propositions as Mr. Locke advances as bidding fairest to be innate, nor to any other propositions. That is, I cannot conceive that our innate moral principles, our natural sentiments, or internal conscious feelings, (name them how you please) which we derive, and which result, from our very nature as creatures morally relative, are at all like unto any propositions whatever.

Who can discover any similitude to any conscious sentiment of the soul in these strangely irrelative propositions: "Whatever is, is."

"It is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be?"

- Nobody. -

The innate principles of the soul, continued he, cannot, any more than those of the body, be propositions. They must be in us antecedently to all our reasonings about them, or they could never be in us at all: for we cannot, by reasoning, create any thing, the principles of which did not exist antecedently. We can, indeed, describe our innate sentiments and perceptions to each other; we can reason, and we can make propositions about them; but our reasonings neither are, nor can create in us, moral principles. They exist prior to, and independently of, all reasoning, and all propositions about them.

When we are told that benevolence is pleasing; that malevolence is painful; we are not convinced of these truths by reasoning, nor by forming them into propositions: but by an appeal to the innate internal affections of our souls: and if on such an appeal, we could not feel

within the sentiment of benevolence, and the peculiar pleasure attending it; and that of malevolence and its concomitant pain; not all the reasoning in the world could ever make us sensible of them, or enable us to understand their nature.

...

Even in the abstracted sciences of arithmetic and geometry, reason can create no principles in the natures of the things treated of. It can lay down axioms, and draw up propositions concerning numbers, extension, and solidity; but numbers, extension, and solidity, existed prior to any reasoning about them.

And here I must observe that the assent or dissent that we give to propositions in these sciences, which are but little interesting to our nature, is drawn from a source widely different from that which we give to moral propositions. Thus, when we are told that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, and see the demonstration; we say simply, true. That they are equal to three right angles; false. These things being irrelative to morals, they move no conscious sentiment, and do therefore only receive our bare assent or dissent as a mere object of sense; in the same manner as when we say a thing is, or is not, black or white, or round or square; we use our eyes, and are satisfied. But the truth or falsehood of moral propositions must be judged of by another measure; through a more interesting medium: we must apply to our internal sense; our divine monitor and guide within; through which the just and unjust, the right and wrong, the moral beauty and deformity of human minds, and of human actions, can only be perceived. And this internal sense must most undoubtedly be innate, as we have already shown; it could not otherwise have existence in us; we not being able, by reasoning, or by any other means, to give ourselves any new sense, or to create, in our nature, any principle at all. I therefore think Mr. Locke, in speaking of innate moral principles, ought, at least, to have made a difference between propositions relative to morals, and those which have no such relation.

If you get interested in the entire argument, [it is here](#):

So the argument that I would make is that there must be some kind of innate mechanism that assembles mental pictures, and that did this mechanism not exist, we would never experience mental pictures in the first place. This mental picture mechanism functions "innately" - pre-rationally, and it can function in ways that we conclude are not "true to all the facts."

An example of that would be in Epicurus's letter to Menoeceus: "But they are not such as the many believe them to be: for indeed they do not consistently represent them as they believe them to be. And the impious man is not he who popularly denies the gods of the many, but he who attaches to the gods the beliefs of the many. For the statements of the many about the gods are not [pre]conceptions derived from sensation, but false suppositions, according to which the greatest misfortunes befall the wicked and the greatest blessings (the good) by the

gift of the gods." (This is the Bailey version, and he insists on using "concepts." I inserted the [pre] because everyone else uses anticipations or prolepsis here rather than "concepts." This is why I am so unhappy with Bailey much of the time.)