

# Reverence and Awe In Epicurean Philosophy

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I'm fine with moving it to public.

Susan, one thing I'd say is that the sensation of awe as connectedness with something "greater" (which is still, IMO, a type of vastness-- vastness not necessarily only meaning physical size) does not mean that there is some attribute of the thing in question which belongs to a being. Humans have awe in response to inanimate objects too, and it is not evidence that during those moments, there is some other consciousness we are contacting or intuiting. The sensation does tell us real information, but the information is about our own brains, about how we feel when we encounter certain stimuli.

What I was trying to get at with the pepper is that when different organisms feel differently, even though the capsaicin is in the pepper, there's still nothing inherently painful about it. The same for awe-- not every human feels awe at the same triggers. I don't think they are "awe-blind", as in color-blindness, unable to experience some inherent quality of the trigger. It's just that the same combinations of sensory inputs don't produce that sensation in everyone. I think that's why feelings and anticipations are in different categories from the senses, because the primary information feelings and anticipations give us is about ourselves, rather than some common inherent quality of the trigger.

This is a big deal, because if we assume that a sensation of connecting with incomprehensible vastness, whether that is a vast size or intellect or complexity or whatever quality, is evidence that a connection is happening with another consciousness-- we will get off in the weeds. It's evidence humans have the feeling of awe, not evidence that we are connecting to other beings. Obviously some combination of things triggers the feeling-- but there's no evidence another consciousness is required.

For evidence that the feeling is responding to an actual connection, we would need sense data. I have that sense data with the infants-- they are right in front of me. If this feeling was selected for to strengthen human relationships under certain environmental pressures, it would make sense, and it's plausible that our pattern recognition processes would assign that sense to inanimate objects as well. Human brains are amazing at pattern recognition, and it's a well known thing that we often over generalize and see patterns that feel meaningful. The Virgin Mary on a piece of toast, etc. Young kids think cars can see them-- the headlights look like eyes.

Humans are neurologically set up for animism if we don't remember we need sense evidence. This is a big part of experimental design-- collecting sense data in a way as to bypass our tendency to form conclusions about patterns that may not be causal or even replicable associations.

I get the feeling you are turned off by atheists... that you think we are missing something, so that you are surprised when you see an atheist express awe. I am an atheist in the modern sense, in that I simply don't hold any supernatural beliefs, and I think Epicurus was also. The difference between me and theists who experience awe is that theists make assumptions that their pattern recognitions are telling them something well beyond what sense data can support. The feeling itself seems qualitatively the same, as far as I can tell from descriptions. I don't know why it would be surprising that atheists have these feelings-- the conclusion aspect isn't required for the feeling.

In the Epicurean sense, I do think it is more likely than not that there exist beings who experience pleasure to a markedly higher degree than do humans... but unlike Epicurus, I think we don't really know yet what factors trigger pleasure for them, considering we know nothing about their planet or their physiology. I don't know if humans would have pleasure in interacting with these beings-- I don't know if our pleasures would coincide with the pleasures of their species. It could be a situation like it is for me and Jefferson, where just because a person practices Epicurean Philosophy doesn't mean we will agree on our pleasures, and we might even dislike the other species while simultaneously agreeing they have achieved greater pleasure. I don't know if communication with them is possible. Sense data is what would answer those questions.