

# Reverence and Awe In Epicurean Philosophy

Post by “Susan Hill” of October 25, 2020 at 5:12 AM

Elayne:

>>>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.

**Is it not doctrinal to Epicureanism that our senses do convey real information about the stimuli, rather than being solely a mental event, as in idealism?**

E:>>>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.

**Agreed.**

E:>>>The same for awe-- not every human feels awe at the same triggers.

**Agreed.**

E:>>>I don't think they are "awe-blind", as in color-blindness, unable to experience some inherent quality of the trigger.

**I think that the reason I do not have the awe response to a baby like you do, is because I do not perceive things that you do about them as a pediatrician. It is a failure on my part to appreciate the incredible beauty and complexity of, I dunno, things like fetal development, gestation, the mother-child bond, infant learning and brain development... I think there are also things that I have made a life-study of that would cue no positive feeling response or deep recognition of beauty and complexity in you. That doesn't mean it is not there.**

E:>>>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.

**I agree it is difficult. You say “a sensation of connecting with incomprehensible vastness, whether that is a vast size or intellect or complexity”. Can that be restated as: “We do have experiences of connection with a vast and complex intellect, but it is very difficult to say anything about the exact nature of that consciousness, or even if that word would apply.”?**

*E:>>>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.*

**My experience of what I would call the divine is similarly empirical, and seems as real to me as the keyboard under my fingers. The only difference is that I have gotten better at seeing it over time (much as Epicurus describes the process of educating a prolepsis). The only difference is that I cannot easily give you the same experience.**

*E:>>>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.*

**I think in the case of inanimate objects, awe is triggered by that same recognition of intelligence and complexity behind the object, as in the mind of an artist that has created a masterwork.**

**Let's look more deeply at the evolutionary angle.**

**It is important to note that it is entirely possible that it is actually LESS adaptive in the evolutionary sense to have access to an excess of information about "divine intelligence". Less of this information could be more useful to immediate concerns for survival. Neurologically, the brain is very much concerned with filtering out or ignoring information that is not considered useful for survival. But altered states of consciousness, from dreams, to those induced by psychedelics, or the simple feeling of awe, can *inhibit* this inhibitory function, giving us access to information that is normally filtered out. As a result, the brain becomes better able to absorb sensory information, and novel perceptions arise. That could be the "vastness" that people are speaking of when describing the object of awe or reverence. They are directly experiencing MORE of the universe - something bigger than they are normally aware of. But cultivating such an expanded state of awareness can come at a cost - the cost of having greater difficulty navigating our everyday reality effectively.**

**As an example of such an altered state, Dr. Andrew Gallimore studies DMT from a neurological and information science perspective. He writes that "most users describe an unshakable feeling of absolute authenticity and the undeniable presence of extreme intelligence beyond anything that could be experienced in the consensus world." Characteristic perceptions include those of "inordinate complexity and higher spatial dimensions (more than three)." Note once again, this does not imply that anything supernatural is occurring. Atoms and void are still at play, and why not?**

*E:>>>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.*

**Yes. The most famous example from India is the analogy of mistaking a rope for a snake. It is a pattern recognition, but as we get closer to the rope, we register more information until we have enough to recognize the true nature of the stimulus.**

*E:>>>Humans are neurologically set up for animism if we don't remember we need sense evidence.*

**Is it your personal experience that you are set-up for animism? Is that something you feel? It is notoriously difficult to determine the nature or credibility of another person's experiences from the outside. In fact, you can't.**

*E:>>>I get the feeling you are turned off by atheists... that you think we are missing something,*

**Only insofar as atheists have implied that I am lacking in intelligence - or "missing something", as you say. We both think that the other is missing something really, but the difference is not one of lack of intelligence. It is of the same nature as my missing the awesomeness of babies. I am not attuned to it.**

*E:>>>so that you are surprised when you see an atheist express awe.*

**Not surprised. I just consciously experience more than the awe, but directly associated with it.**

*E:>>>I am an atheist in the modern sense, in that I simply don't hold any supernatural beliefs, and I think Epicurus was also.*

**Epicurus did not have supernatural beliefs, (and I argue that neither do I), but everything I have read insists he was not an atheist. There are certainly different flavours of atheism, so I am careful to not categorize your beliefs. There are even more flavours of theism than there are atheism.**

*E:>>>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.*

**Maybe that is the crux of it. You assume the conclusions are assumptions, and not direct perception or deduction. It is notoriously difficult to determine the nature or credibility of another person's experiences from the outside.**

*E:>>>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.*

**Agreed!**