

Simulacra, gods and the dead

Post by “timrobbe” of November 14, 2020 at 3:49 AM

Hello friends,

I have a question on EP physics. Please correct me if I am wrong in my premisses and conclusion. I want to resolve something I find to be contradicting.

According to EP when the body dissolves in its atoms the entity dies and will never live again.

The gods are perfect entities and therefor never die.

We know of the gods because in our dreams we receive simulacra of the atoms making up the bodies of the gods.

Now, I know EP says that we do not see the dead but we see simulacra “residue” so to speak. The dead are, well, dead.

My question is: what is the difference between the gods and the dead? If we know of the gods because we see them through simulacra in our dreams and they are alive, why does EP not use this proof to postulate the dead are also alive (eg with the gods in Intermundia) because we see them through simulacra.

Hope to hearing from you guys.

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2020 at 4:30 AM

[Quote from timrobbe](#)

The gods are perfect entities and therefor never die.

This is probably insufficient, as written, to capture the big picture. The gods remain alive, not because they are perfect, and because "perfect" somehow implies immortality, but because they have achieved a method of replenishing their atomic structure so that their overall existence remains in place without necessity of ending. The gods may be said to enjoy "perfect bliss" or "perfect pleasure" but to say today that "the gods are perfect" implies all sorts of other attributes that the Epicureans did not state belonged to the gods.

If that point is not clear then let's discuss further.

[Quote from timrobbe](#)

We know of the gods because in our dreams we receive simulacra of the atoms making up the bodies of the gods.

That is only a part of the full picture of what we know the Epicureans said. If you will refer to the [Velleius section of Cicero's "On the Nature of the Gods,"](#) there you will find the most detailed information we have on what Epicurus taught, which involved anticipations, isonomia, and the view that Nature never creates only a single thing of a kind.

Yes there are passages in several texts which indicate that "images of the gods" are a source of information, but those images (like the anticipations themselves) would be subject to the same issue that you are concerned about - there is always a potential for distortion and inaccuracy in any single perception from any source.

I think it is fair to say that "Images" as a source of information about the gods would necessarily be received from a very long distance away (the gods are in the "intermundia" which we can't see or otherwise sense with the five senses) and in addition to distortions of many types I think you are right - those images might be floating around from dead gods, just like from dead people.

I am with DeWitt that a fair reading of all the texts indicates that the anticipations would be the most reliable way to reach basic conclusions about the gods. Anything that comes from images would be especially subject to correction by comparison to the ultimate conclusions we would draw with higher confidence from the anticipations - such as that the gods live in perfect pleasure and peace and safety and therefore have no need for friends or enemies among humans.

I think the most reliable summary of information we have about the gods would be the section "The New Piety" in DeWitt's "Epicurus and His Philosophy" (which I think you have, right?). I concur with DeWitt that the Velleius material, which was delivered specifically on the point you are asking about (What do we know about the gods and how do we know it?) is good evidence that "anticipations" are the major and overriding source of information, since it seems clear that Velleius rests the thrust of his argument in that department rather than on images.

Post by "timrobbe" of November 14, 2020 at 5:30 AM

Thanks [Cassius](#) .

Immediately went to my copy of DeWitt and started rereading.

To summarize in my own words. EP states we can reach conclusions about gods through the anticipations. Gods are blissful and are not immortal per se, but have reached a level of competence which enable them to stop their body from 'falling apart' and die (so to speak). As simulacra in dreams about gods are insufficient proof of their existence and/or their properties we cannot infer that by simulacra in dreams about dead people, dead people have exist or have the same properties.

Correct?

Post by “Susan Hill” of November 14, 2020 at 8:36 AM

I don't recall where we find the original source, but from Wikipedia:

“Epicurus maintained that he and his followers knew that the gods exist because "our knowledge of them is a matter of clear and distinct perception", meaning that people can empirically sense their presences.[\[108\]](#) He did not mean that people can see the gods as physical objects, but rather that they can see visions of the gods sent from the remote regions of interstellar space in which they actually reside.[\[108\]](#)“

How should we understand this? Some people feel they have clear empirical perceptions of the divine, and many do not.

I found an analogy recently that I was thinking might apply. There is a condition called “amusia” that affects as much as 4% of the population. Such people are not able to recognize music, as such, let alone enjoy it. They do not recognize music as having any beauty of form, harmony, or emotional expression. It is not a pattern that expresses any kind of intelligence to them. Yet the rest of us cannot NOT recognize music, no matter how much an amusic might insist that it is just completely random noise. Nor would it be possible to teach an amusic to appreciate music.

So to return to the original question, what if you had a very “clear and distinct” perception of a ghost? This means you cannot convince yourself that you were hallucinating. I think beyond just writing it off by saying “Epicurus taught that there is no existence after death, therefore I saw nothing”, one could consider other possibilities. For example, there is the “Stone Tape” theory about hauntings that says that ghost are actually “memory traces” left in the environment. That's one possibility that allows for the Epicurean no-life-after-death and no supernatural

beings.

Just me throwing woo into things again, right? 😊

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2020 at 8:40 AM

Remembering always that all I can say is what I think makes the most sense from the material I have read, here is my view:

[Quote from timrobbe](#)

To summarize in my own words. EP states we can reach conclusions about gods through the anticipations. Gods are blissful and are not immortal per se, but have reached a level of competence which enable them to stop their body from 'falling apart' and die (so to speak).

Yes, that is pretty much exactly correct per my reading. What I would add is that the "conclusions" that can be reached about the gods through anticipations are probably pretty limited, to the view that such beings exist, and that since the goal of all life is total pleasure (with zero pain or as little as possible) then beings which have reached the zenith are leading lives that are fully pleasurable to them and are not concerned with rewarding human friends or punishing human enemies. In other words the conclusions that we can be confident about are pretty high level and the more detailed speculation you get into about how they spend their time, beyond the basics, the less confidence we can have in that particular speculation, such as "the gods speak Greek" or look like humans,

[Quote from timrobbe](#)

As simulacra in dreams about gods are insufficient proof of their existence and/or their properties we cannot infer that by simulacra in dreams about dead people, dead people have exist or have the same properties.

Now that one I think is mostly correct in both parts of the sentence but your are linking them in way that might need to be unwound. Yes I would say that Epicurus would hold that images of gods received in dreams is not sufficient proof of their existence. Yes I would say that Epicurus would hold that images of dead people (or anything else) received in a dream are not sufficient proof of the reality of what has been dreamed. Now whether the images received in dreams of gods vs dreams of people have any relationship that might need further discussion, because I

get the impression that dreams of dead people and other things are generally dreams involving things that we have actually seen in the past, while awake, in distinction to dreams about gods, which pretty much by definition we have never seen while awake. So there is probably a distinction worth thinking about there.

Post by "Cassius" of November 14, 2020 at 9:05 AM

[Quote from Susan Hill](#)

Just me throwing woo into things again, right?

No, I don't think that is throwing woo into things, but for example in this case I think we need to question that wikipedia article's choice of words, this one in particular:

*WIKIPEDIA: He did not mean that people can see the gods as physical objects, but rather that they can **see** visions of the gods sent from the remote regions of interstellar space in which they actually reside.*

I would question the accuracy of this sentence, which in fact seems to me to be a little contradictory, in stating first that we can't "see" but then that we can "see." I question whether "see" is the right word even though "vision" is the word that I see is used to translate the passage from the letter to Menoeceus. This is Bailey:

to his blessedness : but believe about him everything that can uphold his blessedness and immortality. For gods there are, since the knowledge of them is by clear vision. 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 denies the gods of the many, but he who attaches to the

This is where we need a [Don](#) to help us track down any critical Greek wording on "see," but my view is that these images are likely not the same kind of images that we talk about being received by "looking at that tree over there." If the gods are in the intermundia (which is probably a fundamental premise of discussions on gods, since it wouldn't be possible to live a perfectly happy life here on earth) then we aren't going to be able to "see" them directly with our eyes like we can see other things.

A related question would be: what do we "see" in dreams? Are we using the eyes for that?

I am thinking that the "knowledge of them by clear vision" must involve something other than the eyes, which I gather is why DeWitt talks about the brain as a "supersensory" mechanism (if I remember his term correctly). The whole nature of the "images" discussion seems to contemplate them traveling all across space in all directions at all times, regardless of whether we choose to turn our head and focus our eyes in a particular direction or not. That would be much like today we are constantly surrounded by radio and television waves which contain information, but which we can't interpret without electronic equipment.

Plus, I think it's probably true that the "images" discussion in general probably includes smells and sounds as well, since the whole discussion of all the bodily senses seems to involve particles traveling across space as the means of transmission.

So no I don't think that this discussion necessarily involves "woo" because I think that there is a lot of detail about images in the texts which are not being given effect by people who stop at the consideration of them as being "through the eyes." This is where I think the DeWitt approach is most important - we should dig through the details of the texts with fresh and unprejudiced eyes, without dismissing what we see at first glance as being "wrong," because Epicurus' frame of reference is so different from ours. I am convinced that Epicurus never "made things up" to suit his conclusions, and if he gave consideration to a particular phenomena like gods or divinity he did so because he thought there was something real there which needed examination.

I am perfectly prepared to believe that the explanation he gave to the phenomena might not be exactly correct, but at least for me I start with a strong presumption that the phenomena does exist in some way. We just need to work to dig it out, which is something that centuries of christians have had no real disposition to do.

Post by "Cassius" of November 14, 2020 at 9:12 AM

As a note to @Martin on an issue I think he raised, I think the "gods are in the intermundia" point above bolsters Martin's observation. We have to accept the conclusion that the gods are in the intermundia, rather than here on earth, for a variety of reasons, and one thing that implies is that the gods are going to be so far away that we won't expect to be able to "see" them with normal vision any more than we can see the details of stars or planets. Were we to think we see a person-sized being in front of us talking to us, then no doubt we are experiencing something, but that person-sized being in front of us would not be expectable be a true "God" from the intermundia. In fact I think I will use the "conceivable" word there. Seeing a true god in front of us in human form would be "inconceivable" given our premises about true gods.

Post by “Susan Hill” of November 14, 2020 at 9:18 AM

No I am sure you are completely right - it is an “internal vision” that is intended, even by the wiki post. I think the word “images” is misleading too. But then, with all the talk about the gods having human form, maybe Epicurus really did intend to convey that he saw, e.g. Venus, as though in a dream - as a visual object. Or was he describing “sensing” the gods clearly in other ways?

Post by “Don” of November 14, 2020 at 11:57 AM

I heard my name 😊

The "clear vision" translates enargēs εναργής in the Greek. Here's an excerpt from my rough draft on that section of the letter. Enargēs is in verse 123f:

123d. πᾶν δὲ τὸ φυλάττειν αὐτοῦ δυνάμενον τὴν μετ’ ἀφθαρσίας μακαριότητα περὶ αὐτοῦ δόξαζε.

Remember δὲ "and, so" comes second in Greek but first in English.

The imperative verb comes last again: δόξαζε πᾶν = doxaze pan "You think, believe, imagine everything!" Believe what about everything?

τὸ φυλάττειν αὐτοῦ δυνάμενον τὴν μετ’ ἀφθαρσίας μακαριότητα περὶ αὐτοῦ = to phylattein autou dynamenon tēn met' aphtharsias makariotēta peri autou

φυλάττειν = to phylattein "to guard, maintain, preserve, etc." δυνάμενον = "being able, capable, strong enough to do, can"

Bringing all 123d back together: "Being able to preserve its own imperishability and blessedness for itself"

"(You, Menoikeus,) Believe everything about which a god is able to preserve its own imperishability and blessedness for itself."

123e. θεοὶ μὲν γὰρ εἰσιν. θεοὶ μὲν γὰρ εἰσιν. = theoi men gar eisin.

If we take out the μὲν (and look for the inevitable δε in the next phrase) and move γάρ "because, for" out of the way, we can pare this down to:

θεοὶ εἰσιν. "Gods exist." "There are gods."

The implications of those two words have had entire essays (if not books) written about them. We looked at this a little in 123b with ζῶον. But Epicurus is not equivocating here: Gods exist. What he means by this we simply have to discover from his extant works and fragments.

123f. ἐναργῆς δέ ἐστιν αὐτῶν ἢ γνῶσις: Here's our δέ "on the other hand."

ἐναργῆς [δέ] ἐστιν αὐτῶν ἢ γνῶσις: = enargēs estin autōn hē gnōsis. "And the knowledge (ἢ γνῶσις) of them (θεοί "gods") is ἐναργῆς." But what does ἐναργῆς mean? It has two primary definitions:

- visible, palpable, in bodily shape, properly of gods appearing in their own forms (in Homer); so of a dream or vision; ex., ἐναργῆς ταῦρος "in visible form a bull, a very bull"

- manifest to the mind's eye, distinct

This fits right in with our problem with puzzling out how the gods are ζῶον. Are they physically-existent material beings? Are they existing only as mental perceptions manifest merely to the mind's eye? We still don't have a clear idea of Epicurus's meaning!

123g. οἴους δ' αὐτοὺς <οἱ> πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν, οὐκ εἰσίν: = hoious d' autous <hoi> polloi nomizousin, ouk eisin.

LSJ has this to say about οἴους: "Especially in Attic often stands for ὅτι τοῖος, τοία, τοῖον, so that the relative introduces the reason for the preceding statement... "if it is to be intimated that the reason is self-evident, and the assertion is beyond doubt, then δὴ is added..." (Note: Which it is here! δ' is elided but is actually δή.) <οἱ> πολλοὶ is exactly what it means in English: "hoi polloi" the common people, the masses. It literally translates as "the many." Paraphrase: "The gods 'do not exist' (οὐκ εἰσίν) in the way that the 'hoi polloi' believe them (i.e., the gods) to."

Post by "Cassius" of November 14, 2020 at 12:10 PM

[Quote from Susan Hill](#)

that he saw, e.g. Venus, as though in a dream - as a visual object.

Or I think it is also conceivable in all sorts of allegorical ways, as in seeing a statue or painting of Venus

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2020 at 12:22 PM

Thank you for that information on the Greek, Don.

This is one of those places where I have to watch that I don't overstate the case, but I think it is mandatory, essential, and a key to the entire philosophy that Epicurus would not allow a major premise or observation to stand contradicted by another one, and leave the contradiction unresolved. Meaning, once he concluded that the gods were of such nature that they were (1) nonsupernatural, and (2) living in perfect peace, with the implication of no favorites or enemies among humans, and (3) by their nature in the intermundia or in some other way not here on earth where their type of existence would be excluded, then I think he would rigorously maintain that everything else has to be understood in accord with those premises.

So while we always have to be careful not to take things to an extreme that the words we have won't bear, I think the key to interpretation of the other passages is to work from the beginning on what is meant by "images" and also by "anticipations" and work toward a position that is logically consistent with those earlier "physics" positions about the nature of the gods.

I think all sorts of the term "idola" or "images" or "spectres" is possible, with the main limiting factor being that Epicurus was looking to explain how things occur naturally, and that "action at a distance" can never be supernatural, so must involve the flow of something between object and observer. That leaves a huge variety of options to choose from so long as it doesn't involve supernatural universe-creating god(s), and given that I understand Plato was postulating "lesser gods" as a means of world-governing then Epicurus might have left open that there are beings who are not gods who nevertheless could (if we could prove it) be flying around the universe. Of course what I am talking about there is more on the order of "Martians" and other sci-fi material, but I also gather without wearing too much tin foil that even the current observations of UFOs might not be ridiculous to entertain.

However to bring this back to base I think a large part of what Epicurus was thinking about was the benefit of contemplating what "the best life" might entail, as a means of inspiration and aspiration and motivation, all of which are necessary at least to some degrees for some people to ward off the ultimate evil of "nihilism."

Post by “Don” of November 14, 2020 at 12:29 PM

Quote from Cassius

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I think you're onto something there. Epicurus does say we can live a life worthy of the gods (or was that Lucretius?), so the gods serve a purpose just not a favor-seeking, punishment-dealing purpose.

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2020 at 12:44 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Epicurus does say we can live a life worthy of the gods (or was that Lucretius?)

I think your referencing Lucretius where he talks about using reason to deal with the residual forces that nature implants within us, but of course also it's Epicurus who talked about living "as gods among men."

I think it's a huge issue as to why, once we find that we can have pleasure even living in a cave on bread and water, we would ever decide to venture out for variations in pleasure. There are many practical reasons, of course, but I do think there is an inner drive to "self-improvement" that is associated or part of this pleasure drive. Variation may not be necessary, but there's no commandment or reason to settle for "simple pleasures" when there are other pleasures that you decide are within your reach at a reasonable cost in pain and that you judge (or feel) would be rewarding for you to have. And of course the aspect of "visualizing goals" seems to be deeply rooted in human psychology.

Post by “timrobbe” of November 14, 2020 at 2:02 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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I am currently writing a Ph.D thesis on the politics, law and sociology of distributing scarce resources (more specifically the distribution of 'limited rights' like grants and subsidies by governmental agencies). That is why this quote by [Cassius](#) resonated with me.

Scarcity as a concept was unknown in traditional communities. People pursued goals and used certain means. Only with the introduction of modern economics did problems with scarcity arise. The goals people can choose to pursue became limited in number. This makes the means scarce by definition. For modern economics, scarcity in means is therefore ontological. John Rawls writes about a dialectic of faculties and desires. He assumes that people always want to improve themselves (more). However, this goal also becomes limitless in the framework of modern society and economics. However, the means, the faculties of (wo)man are limited by nature. Rawls thus legitimizes scarcity and legitimizes the current economic system, including its negative effects. One can get very frustrated, even violent, seeing others improve themselves even more. Aristotle, but especially Epicurus, shows that scarcity is not ontological at all. After all, it is not about scarcity in means, but about limiting your goals. [PD29](#) is indicative of this. In current society and economics and in Rawls' conception of self-improvement there are the dangers of limitless goals. I think Epicurus really wanted to warn us about these concepts. Indeed, be thankful for the faculties and talents given to you by nature and beware of wanting more than you can become and have.

Post by “Don” of November 14, 2020 at 2:27 PM

While others may be aware of this, I just discovered this week (listening to the Natalie Haynes Stands Up for the Classics podcast) that an alternate story of Helen of Troy has her living out the war in Egypt while an image or εἰδωλον is sent by a god to Troy. After the city falls, the Helen εἰδωλον simply fades away in the wind.

I find it fascinating that this is the same word Epicurus uses for "images". Granted, words can evolve in meaning but I thought that was an interesting etymological trivia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helen_of_Troy?wprov=sfla1

Post by “Godfrey” of November 14, 2020 at 3:05 PM

To me it's important when considering the gods to keep anticipations in mind.

Going a little freeform here.... Consider the anticipations as "pattern recognition." The obvious implication of this is recognizing patterns, but the less obvious (and here I'm speculating 🤔) implication is the urge to solving mysteries, which at some level is recognizing patterns. Nature and life are full of mystery (which of course we should celebrate), and to me it is the urge to solving mysteries of nature which is the true anticipation of the gods. That seems to be the main common denominator between polytheistic, monotheistic, animistic, human, "primitive" and "advanced" conceptions of gods. To me, the idea that the gods speak Greek or are individuals or that there is one all-powerful God, when seen as an anticipation, is evidence of the effect of cultural norms on pattern recognition which in turn had an effect on Epicurus' ideas of the gods. Visions of the gods can come from exposure to the myths just as visions of the dead can come from memories of the living.

It's also of great use when considering the anticipations to keep the gods in mind. 😊

Post by “Godfrey” of November 14, 2020 at 3:15 PM

As an aside, there's a science fiction book that takes a completely opposite look at immortals: *The Boat of a Million Years*, by Poul Anderson. It follows the lives of a few people who, for some unexplained reason, were born immortal. This only became evident to them as they stopped aging and outlived their peers, their children, etc. The drama of the book comes from how they have to interact with society and, eventually, with each other. They're pretty much the opposite of PD1, which makes it an interesting read and an obtuse way to meditate on the [Epicurean gods](#). Also a tonic when thinking about the gods reaches a point of brain freeze!

Post by “Susan Hill” of November 14, 2020 at 5:17 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1765-simulacra-gods-and-the-dead/>

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

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It's also of great use when considering the anticipations to keep the gods in mind. 😊

This would be elucidated by examining the spiritual feelings of children, perhaps raised by atheists, like myself, or outside of any religious context. If spirituality is innate, you would find some such youth seeking out explanations for their instincts at some point. Or, you may find people raised in one cultural religious context, nevertheless converting to other belief systems that better reflect their instincts.

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/h...row_in_children

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2020 at 6:35 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Consider the anticipations as "pattern recognition."

I think that we've gotten in the the habit of thinking that "pattern recognition" is a part of anticipations, and I think that is a good start. However as we go further it's not clear to me that this is much more than a start, because what do we mean by "pattern" and "recognition." if we consider it to be a "matching" of something that is already within us then we have to be careful that we're not going Platonic and considering the mind at birth to have ready-made ideas of any kind within it. I don't really have anything better to suggest at the moment but if forced to say something more I would probably use words like a "faculty" that "disposes us to organize what we perceive" in ways that are helpful to our forming of mental images that we then store in our memories and use as operators for further analysis.

That would pretty well track what Diogenes Laertius was saying, but I'm thinking that what is missing in Laertius is a discussion of "how the faculty works" and what kind of "dispositions" do exist within it that influence the pictures that we eventually form. If we were to consider the faculty of anticipations as a process of forming these images within our minds then it might not

be far-fetched to consider the possibility that this process could be influenced directly within the mind by influences from outside that don't come through the eyes, ears, nose, skin, or tongue, but more like I gather scientists experimenting with doing by use of ...(what, I am not sure how they are doing it, but I presume somehow electrical or magnetic?) stimuli.

So basically I am saying that calling anticipations pattern recognition is probably the start of the analysis rather than the end.

Post by “Don” of November 14, 2020 at 7:25 PM

I keep going back to those experiments with infants and toddlers on fair play, "justice", etc. We humans seem too have an innate sense of justice and fair play as well as awe and amazement. That's where my analysis of the prolepses starts.

Post by “Godfrey” of November 14, 2020 at 7:44 PM

Susan could you clarify this? One does see these things, so are you saying that that makes spirituality innate? I would say that attraction to mystery is innate and possibly part of the process of "pattern recognition" or "anticipations," and that for some people that attraction can motivate them toward attentiveness to certain patterns. But to me, "spirituality" is quite a broad and somewhat vague term and that makes it difficult for me to wrap my head around.

Post by “Godfrey” of November 14, 2020 at 7:46 PM

Oops I see I cross posted! My last post is referring to post #18 from Susan.

Post by “Godfrey” of November 14, 2020 at 7:55 PM

Quote

...I would probably use words like a "faculty" that "disposes us to organize what we perceive" in ways that are helpful to our forming of mental images that we then store in our memories and use as operators for further analysis.

Cassius, that's a good description to me, if we could just find a nice, concise way of saying that! But as you say it is just a start. That's one reason that I think that grappling with the gods (as it were) is a fruitful exercise.

Post by "Godfrey" of November 14, 2020 at 8:13 PM

Quote

I keep going back to those experiments with infants and toddlers on fair play, "justice", etc. We humans seem too have an innate sense of justice and fair play as well as awe and amazement. That's where my analysis of the prolepses starts.

Don, that is a good place to start. Taking the viewpoint of prolepses as a "faculty that disposes us organize what we perceive..." then justice and fair play seem to be a way of connecting our sensations with our feelings. An infant sees someone do something and then feels good, this is "organized" as a perception of justice.

Awe seems more complex I think.... Is it a strong emotion? This brings up two points: aren't emotions "components" of pleasure and pain? Also emotions can diminish over time (one can get jaded to what once caused a strong reaction) but it seems like prolepses tend to sharpen over time.

Post by "Don" of November 14, 2020 at 8:34 PM

I would agree awe is more complex. Looking at the babies in studies, their rapt attention certainly appears like awe from the outside. But the sustained nature of it makes it appear to me more than an emotion. I was going to say just an emotion. But my jury is out on awe.

I also think we have to distinguish among feeling (for which I personally am reserving only pleasure or pain and equating to reaction for purposes of Epicureanism) and emotion and prolepses. I think some or all 3 are connected but they're not equivalent. I personally equate "feeling" as in our other thread on "facts don't care..." with emotions. I "feel" emotions are more cognitive as in "I feel angry" "I feel sad" etc. and we can think about how we "feel." Whereas the pathē "feelings" of pleasure and pain are immediate. We don't get to "feel" whether we react with pleasure or pain. We react! It's immediate. There are no mitigating factors. Nothing between us and the reaction. We are repelled or attracted. We sense pleasure or pain. No in between.

Post by “Godfrey” of November 14, 2020 at 9:28 PM

From the article that Susan linked to in #18:

Quote

But we know that young babies are also [busy little scientists](#) scanning, analyzing, and making sense of their environment.

This could explain babies' sustained rapt attention.

Regarding awe, as they say at least once in every TV show, "it's complicated." Feelings and emotions are slippery terms, which is why "reactions" might be a good translation of pathē (Don, did you suggest that?) There is definitely a reactive element to emotions: what you feel (there's that word 🤔) right away in response to sensations. I'd say that the pathē are the reactive parts of emotions, and that they are felt as either pleasure or pain. A particular emotion can be either painful or pleasant. So emotions and pathē are intertwined in some way it seems, but putting it into words gets confusing.

Post by “Susan Hill” of November 15, 2020 at 7:05 AM

A review of the literature regarding innate leanings towards spirituality/religion is frustrating because, although books and articles like "The God Gene" start off by saying, yes, there is a genetic and innate neurological proclivity towards spiritual seeking/belief, they then descend into scientism.

The narrative goes "There is a gene (or brain state) that can be correlated with spiritual proclivity; all religious experience is false; therefore, these delusional experiences must be evolutionarily adaptive in some way, like pro-social, as an encouragement to breed in the face of death (!), or because of anti-depressive qualities." Arrg...

Substitute in other words for things that you find meaningful and real and see how you feel about the conclusion. Instead of spirituality/religion, how about "love", or music or mathematics or science!

"There is a gene (or brain state) that can be correlated with an attraction to science; all scientific reasoning is based on false premises; therefore, these tendencies must be evolutionarily adaptive in some way, like pro-social, as an encouragement to breed in the face of death (!), or because of anti-depressive qualities." Lol.

Regarding Cassius' "...I would probably use words like a "faculty" that "disposes us to organize what we perceive" in ways that are helpful to our forming of mental images that we then store in our memories and use as operators for further analysis."

I'm wondering if this were the definition of a prolepsis/anticipation, how would it be different from simple "learning ability" or "the faculty of cognition", or "knowledge creation ability"?

Post by “Cassius” of November 15, 2020 at 7:43 AM

Some comments on a number of posts:

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

so are you saying that that makes spirituality innate?

I singled that out as a good example of the need for a definition of spirituality. What is "spirituality"? Have we made any progress in defining what we mean there?

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

grappling with the gods

I like that phrase!

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

justice and fair play seem to be a way of connecting our sensations with our feelings.

Yes I am thinking in that direction too. Maybe more generally, "anticipations are a way of connecting our sensations with our feelings." Or at the very least, "anticipations and sensations and feelings are all connected closely" which I think is a point that DeWitt emphasizes.

[Quote from Susan Hill](#)

there is a genetic and innate neurological proclivity towards spiritual seeking/belief,

That's another sentence that cries out for clarity in "what does spiritual mean?"

[Quote from Susan Hill](#)

I'm wondering if this were the definition of a prolepsis/anticipation, how would it be different from simple "learning ability" or "the faculty of cognition", or "knowledge creation ability"?

Right Susan. That's where I think the issue is with the Diogenese Laetrius section on anticipations, and the standard position on anticipations today. Clearly there is a process of "conceptual reasoning" that coincides with your terms "leaning ability" and "faculty of cognition" and "knowledge creation ability." Clearly all normal people go through life seeing new things (cell phones for example) and forming new pictures/conceptions of groups of cell phones until they have a mental image/definition of a cell phone that they then apply to new experiences. There's no doubt that conceptual reasoning exists. The big question is whether there is any "etching" of mental operations that plants the seeds so to speak as to how that process is going to occur or the directions it is going to pursue. Even if we agree (I think most of us do) that there are no innate "ideas," there do seem to be innate "principles of operation" that will end up disposing us in certain directions.

I think a decent analogy here is that of how we distinguish a computer operating system from application software. The operating system sets the basis limits and bounds of what a computer can do to interface with the real world (including printers and hard disks and monitors) while the application program is where true "data" is dumped in over time and the conceptual assembly process gets working to do advanced calculatiing.

So think the big problem is that the standard commentators are caught in the "blank slate" Aristotelian position and they focus exclusively on conceptual reasoning, which is part of the process, but they exclude the "etching" aspect which is clearly stated in Velleius because they think that conflicts with their blank slate starting point.

Post by “Susan Hill” of November 15, 2020 at 11:14 AM

What does "spiritual" mean..... Well, I don't think we are going to get a clear definition on that one, and yet we do all have an idea of what it means...

From Wikipedia: "There is no single, widely agreed-upon definition of spirituality. Surveys of the definition of the term, as used in scholarly research, show a broad range of definitions with limited overlap. A survey of reviews by McCarroll each dealing with the topic of spirituality gave twenty-seven explicit definitions, among which "there was little agreement." This impedes the systematic study of spirituality and the capacity to communicate findings meaningfully..... In modern times the emphasis is on subjective experience and the "deepest values and meanings by which people live," incorporating personal growth or transformation, usually in a context separate from organized religious institutions."

I was thinking along the lines of "spiritual" meaning relating to the numinous or divine, but that turns out to be circular since "numinous" is defined as relating to the spiritual! "Spiritual," "divine", "God".... I'm afraid there really is a point at which language breaks down. There are a few extra words to describe it in Greek, and quite a few more in Sanskrit, but often it is described in terms of what it is NOT - it is the ineffable. And yet we do manage to talk about it, even without a dictionary definition.

Post by “Cassius” of November 15, 2020 at 2:36 PM

[Quote from Susan Hill](#)

And yet we do manage to talk about it, even without a dictionary definition.

I definitely think we need to work on at least a "working" definition for our use here, which we will eventually want to add to the Lexicon and/or the FAQ. That's pretty much exactly what we have to do with "Gods" "Virtue" "Pleasure" "Truth" and probably many other words.

In this case it doesn't help much but whatever working definition probably needs to include the "not supernatural" qualifier, but obviously that's not a satisfactory start. "Divinity" is a term that presumably exists whether we recognize it or not, because "the [Epicurean gods](#)" are held to exist whether or not we know it. I presume "spirit" is also a term that is used so thoroughly that we can say that it exists whether we recognize it or not, but it's closely tied in to "mind" and "soul" and has been better articulated.

It's entirely unclear to me whether "spirit" in the Epicurean sense has any real connection with "the [Epicurean gods](#)" or what that connection would be. From the point of view of the surviving texts, we could probably have reverence for "the gods" and profit from that presumably even if we never had a "spiritual" experience.

Probably it is first necessary to define "spirit" before we define "spiritual experience." If the spirit is different from the mind, then presumably it has its own "experiences" which are different from mental or "physical" experiences. But of course there is the premise that nothing exists except "matter" and void, so whatever experiences are going on presumably have a "material" aspect to them.

I think the place to start is more the question of separating the terms "mind" "soul" and 'spirit" and determining whether they are separate entities from the Epicurean viewpoint.

NOTE: Again, I think it's best we start "from the Epicurean viewpoint" rather than "what we ourselves think is the case" because we can't really be sure whether we agree or disagree with Epicurus unless we know what HIS viewpoint was.

Post by “Susan Hill” of November 16, 2020 at 8:44 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I think the place to start is more the question of separating the terms "mind" "soul" and 'spirit" and determining whether they are separate entities from the Epicurean viewpoint.

Yes, I'm unsure that spirituality, in our case, would actually have anything to do with our "spirit" or "soul", since these are not seen as supernatural or immortal, or as part of God...

I'm not at all confident of my ability to come up with a definition that would satisfy many, but here is very tentative attempt:

I begin with a quote from Carl Sagan:

‘Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality. When we recognize our place in an immensity of light-years and in the passage of ages, when we grasp the intricacy, beauty, and subtlety of life, then that soaring feeling, that sense of elation and humility combined, is surely spiritual ... The notion that science and spirituality are somehow mutually exclusive does a disservice to both.’

I like his words "profound, immense, intricate, beautiful, subtle, elating, humbling..." But for the theist, these things are seen to have their origin in the divine (God).

Epicurus observed certain religious practices as part of his spirituality, and he did this by way of cultivating appreciation for, and connectedness with, the gods.

So perhaps Epicurean spirituality is the recognition of the profound, intricate, beautiful, blissful, subtle, elating, humbling and tranquil nature of the gods, and the practice of attuning our own nature to that god-like state.

Now this is not a definition that would appeal to the atheist or secular Buddhist, who claim a spirituality without any gods, but a spirituality without any gods is a very modern innovation, and I think it would be unrecognizable to Epicurus.

Thoughts?

Post by "Cassius" of November 16, 2020 at 10:21 AM

[Quote from Susan Hill](#)

So perhaps Epicurean spirituality is the recognition of the profound, intricate, beautiful, blissful, subtle, elating, humbling and tranquil nature of the gods, and the practice of attuning our own nature to that god-like state.

I think in response here that I would say that probably either as a part of anticipations, of pleasure-recognition, or of both, that there is a disposition to recognize *the profound, intricate, beautiful, blissful, subtle, elating, humbling and tranquil nature of **anything*** which we would expect to find the highest manifestation thereof in the highest level of beings which we would expect to exist within the universe.

So those characteristics you list are all things that exist in varying degrees in the things we come into contact with here on earth and would experience as part of those interactions, so we have a faculty of recognizing those characteristics which does process data received through the eyes/ears/tongue/nose/skin, but that faculty of recognition is probably not itself a part of the eyes/ears/tongue/nose/skin.

So the question that is probably on the table is how this faculty of recognition operates, and whether it can receive stimulus that is not strictly part of the eyes/ears/tongue/nose/skin.

1. Is this faculty purely operating in accord with the "etching" that it has at birth?

2. Is this faculty operating purely in accord with its etching plus its influences by the things we see/hear/taste/touch/smell during our lifetime after birth?

3. Is this faculty operating in accord with its etching, plus what we see/hear/taste/touch/smell during our lifetime after birth, plus something else that is perceivable by the brain through mechanisms not currently understood by science, but understandable by science after additional study through techniques not yet invented? (For a gross example, attempts to study claims of "ESP" or "gravity waves" or "cosmic rays" or similar claims of repeatable phenomena, all of which - if proved to exist through repeated observation - we will presume due to our prior conclusions to be the work of a "natural" and not the work of a "universe-creating-supernatural-being" phenomena? I suppose even "contact with a UFO" or "contact with an alien race" would fit in this category if they actually landed in Central Park and said "We are here to serve men" and gave us what we thought at first was a table of profound natural laws but which turned out to be a cookbook.)

Post by “Susan Hill” of November 17, 2020 at 8:56 AM

>>So the question that is probably on the table is how this faculty of recognition operates, and whether it can receive stimulus that is not strictly part of the eyes/ears/tongue/nose/skin.

I think the answer to that is presently as elusive to science as the question of how consciousness arises. Some even say consciousness is an illusion, therefore.

>>1. Is this faculty purely operating in accord with the "etching" that it has at birth?

Perhaps the recognition of divine intelligence, blissful and immortal, but not a dram more.

>>2. Is this faculty operating purely in accord with its etching plus its influences by the things we see/hear/taste/touch/smell during our lifetime after birth?

Going on the other things I have read discussed herein and written elsewhere, the faculty can mature and be educated by repeated exposure, yes. However, great care must be taken in controlling rampant speculation about things that we cannot possibly have rational or sensory evidence of.

>>>3. Is this faculty operating in accord with its etching, plus what we see/hear/taste/touch/smell during our lifetime after birth, plus something else that is perceivable by the brain through mechanisms not currently understood by science, but understandable by science after additional study through techniques not yet invented? (For a gross example, attempts to study claims of "ESP" or "gravity waves" or "cosmic rays" or similar

claims of repeatable phenomena, all of which - if proved to exist through repeated observation - we will presume due to our prior conclusions to be the work of a "natural" and not the work of a "universe-creating-supernatural-being" phenomena? I suppose even "contact with a UFO" or "contact with an alien race" would fit in this category if they actually landed in Central Park and said "We are here to serve men" and gave us what we thought at first was a table of profound natural laws but which turned out to be a cookbook.)

Yes.

Post by "Cassius" of November 17, 2020 at 10:39 AM

[Quote from Susan Hill](#)

Yes.

HA!

[Quote from Susan Hill](#)

I think the answer to that is presently as elusive to science as the question of how consciousness arises. Some even say consciousness is an illusion, therefore.

I think the first sentence is well taken, but as for those who say consciousness is an illusion, I think we're going to find that Epicurus took consciousness to be one of those primaries (like the senses) that must be accepted and not looked behind, so therefore NOT an illusion. I'm thinking that this is one of those areas that leads down the slippery slope to nihilism in practical terms, but it's also something that is probably part of the "logic" debate that I think Epicurus was also having with the other schools. So we probably have two separate issues (1) the physics of the operation of the brain, and (2) our correctness in considering the senses as primary contacts with reality, with consciousness too being subject to all types of error, but not an "illusion" as if we could one day wake up from it. I presume it's more correct to say that consciousness "is" us like saying Toys'RUs - ConsciousnessIsUs.

I reserve the right to revise, extend, or retract all those statements! But that is where I currently am thinking makes the most sense trying to reconcile the state of modern science plus what Epicurus was saying.

It's easy for us to go to google and dig out observations on "What modern science says" even though of course there are lots of unresolved questions there.

I think it's our particular challenge here to also ask "What was Epicurus thinking?" because he was immersed in the high-level logical arguments of ancient Greek philosophy, and I sometimes think (as in the "absence of pain" formulation) that he was so far ahead of us in the terms of his discussion that we don't recognize what he was saying. Probably the same can be said for his statements on divinity.

Post by "Susan Hill" of November 17, 2020 at 12:18 PM

>>I sometimes think (as in the "absence of pain" formulation) that he was so far ahead of us in the terms of his discussion that we don't recognize what he was saying. Probably the same can be said for his statements on divinity

That's quite possible. He could have done something really profound in realizing a theology that did not become tied up with strict asceticism. It would be so sad if there is not enough to reconstruct it. It is incredibly unique.

Post by "Don" of November 17, 2020 at 12:19 PM

Quote

(For a gross example, attempts to study claims of "ESP" or "gravity waves" or "cosmic rays"

I would not under any circumstances include ESP with gravity waves and cosmic rays.

ESP is repeatedly debunked, including failure of anyone to win the \$1,000,000 prize from the Randi Foundation. If you're using this as shorthand for intuition, then maybe. But not ESP as a parapsychology phenomenon.

Gravity waves and cosmic rays are verifiable and verified physical phenomena. In fact, cosmic rays can be viewed in a homemade cloud chamber.

Post by "Cassius" of November 17, 2020 at 6:53 PM

Yes I don't mean to be taking the position that I am a "believer" in ESP. My dividing line is in my view strictly pragmatic - I am not sure exactly how I would define that, but my attitude is something like "if it can be shown to be a repeatable phenomena that can be observed by more than one observer over time and under conditions that eliminate subterfuge, then I don't care how many "scientists" have previously said it "can't happen." The "proof is in the pudding" and all sorts of other cliches that focus on the actual results rather than on prior predictions of what is possible.

On the other hand, the question is "Do we have to suspend judgment and accept any alleged theory where someone says 'it hasn't been proved yet, but it will be?" My answer would be "no" to that too.

Post by “GilbertoMoncada” of January 6, 2021 at 11:33 AM

Es increíble todo este análisis, gracias a ustedes por compartirlo

Post by “Cassius” of January 6, 2021 at 1:37 PM

Google Translate says: "All this analysis is incredible, thanks to you for sharing it"

You are welcome Gilberto. Unfortunately most of us here speak only English...