

Epicurean Perceptual Content by A. Gavran Milos

Post by "Godfrey" of December 3, 2020 at 8:42 PM

I found the attached paper to be quite thought provoking, particularly regarding the *eidola*. The paper focuses on the senses, which the author refers to as perceptions. It's a discussion on the Epicurean assertion that [all sensations are true](#), and the author addresses this partly through examining the *eidola*.

Reading about the *eidola* in this way gave me an opportunity to ruminate on them as a proto-scientific attempt to understand perception via atomic theory. Epicurus covered a lot of ground with them (from objects, to dreams, to visions) and it's interesting to think about how these functions in early atomic theory apply to the science of perception today.

There's more to the paper than that; definitely worth perusing.

Post by "Cassius" of December 4, 2020 at 11:14 AM

Looks like a good find and important read. I had time to skim the first page or two but I was immediately struck that DeWitt's way of explaining the truth issue (honestly reported, like a witness in court who is honestly reporting but might be mistaken) doesn't seem to be Milos' approach. If you have read the full article, Godfrey, is my impression correct?

I see this is the conclusion. "Factive"????? That doesn't sound very helpful to me.

Then there is the sentence that I underlined. If I read this correctly then he is basically taken the Bailey approach: we see things, we form concepts (pictures) of what we have seen, and those concepts/pictures become standards of truth for future analysis. That's not the view I tend to agree with, but I want to read and think about this in more detail. My problem has always been, and remains, that I think Epicurus held a standard of truth to be something that is perceptual and not challengeable in and of itself, in that we need to take every perception (taste, touch, sight, etc) as a given for what is being honestly reported by the faculty at that moment. A "belief" or a "concept," on the other hand, is by definition full of opinion, and can't be considered unchallengeable, can it? Or can it? I think another way of stating my concern relates to his last sentence. To me, the process of seeing things and forming pictures is obviously very important, but I don't consider it to be an "epistemological" tool as much as an "analytic" tool (or thinking tool or some other word that preserves the distinction that this tool

in representation of the world consists in the fact that perception represents the world in a nonconceptual way, serving as a tribunal of the way things are passively given in perception without any intervention upon stimuli. I believe that taken this way the content of perception can be characterized as purely factual. Exactly the feature of passivity and givenness enables perception to serve as the foundation of cognition, to be self-evident and the criterion of truth. Namely in perceiving subject is not able to intervene in the process, but is passively stimulated from outside, which in the end guarantees validity of all perceptions. In Epicurean terms, the eidolic theory excludes a possibility of any intervention in perceptual content, for which I argued, is the starting point for reading that such content is nonconceptual.

Since perceptions are impossible to refute, they sharply differ from beliefs which can be false. Given that perceptions in Epicurean epistemology cannot be false it seems plausible to assume that truth and falsity cannot be ascribed to perceptions and beliefs in the same sense. Therefore, I accept a new proposal for the interpretation of *alethes* as factive. ??????

From this we can infer that the beliefs will be true if they correctly extract and structure information delivered through the sensory organs by applying correct concepts in order to classify, structure and express the content of perception. The concepts that are applied are Epicurean preconceptions. This reading I believe serves as a good ground for understanding why preconceptions are necessary as the second criterion of truth. Namely, preconceptions originate from a memory of what is often perceived (DL X.33) and

enable us to articulate what we see in the form of judgment and as such are necessary epistemological tool for testing truth and falsehood together with perceptions.¹¹

Post by “Godfrey” of December 4, 2020 at 4:05 PM

Yes "factive" isn't very clear.

As I understand the paper he makes a clear distinction between perceptions and beliefs. Perceptions are true and not describable by propositions, while beliefs are testable propositions and therefore not a criterion of truth.

An example he uses, with reservations, is that of a photograph. Perceptions can be compared to a photograph in that they pick up the information, but they don't store it as a photograph does. He also discusses that *eidola* include not just information about an object but also available information about the context of the object. This is one reason that they are true, but information regarding a specific object of perception needs to be verified through numerous instances of perception.

Post by “Cassius” of December 4, 2020 at 7:12 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Perceptions are true and not describable by propositions, while beliefs are testable propositions and therefore not a criterion of truth.

Now I do think that is a very clear and useful statement.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

An example he uses, with reservations, is that of a photograph

And that's an interesting example and gives something concrete to talk about. The photograph becomes something to which we can compare future observations ,but in and of itself the photograph is a limited representation and doesn't really contain any opinion about what is on the film. Sounds like a good article.

Post by “Don” of December 4, 2020 at 11:46 PM

I noted you referred to the author as "he" a couple times. At the risk of being pedantic, the author is a woman: <https://portal.uniri.hr/portfelj/933>

Post by “Cassius” of December 5, 2020 at 7:02 AM

Thanks for pointing that out! And a relatively young one too, which is good to see that younger people are still interested in Epicurus.

Looks like she wrote at least one more article on the topic that we ought to look at:

2012.
Epicurus on the Origin and Formation of Preconceptions
Gavran Miloš, Ana
Croatian Journal of Philosophy - 35 239-256
A2

so it appears she is in Croatia - a very interesting area

Post by “Godfrey” of December 5, 2020 at 1:47 PM

I just sent her a request for the full text of the preconceptions paper through Researchgate. If I get a positive response I'll post the paper in a new thread. Meanwhile I'll probably get lots of emails from Researchgate suggesting other papers, at least if they're similar to Academia. Might be a good source of information though: I noticed that they have a paper on Epicurus' concept of the void by Brad Inwood.

Don't thanks for pointing out that the author is a woman. Erroneous assumption on my part. 😬