

# Anticipations - Justice & Divine Nature

**Post by “EricR” of August 15, 2021 at 9:49 AM**

Hi All,

It has been a loooong time since I posted here. I've been roaming philosophical/spiritual landscapes and my explorations have led me back here. Go figure! I will talk about that on my wall as it is personal.

I'm slow-reading DeWitt's book. I came across this line on page 213 (ch 11 Soul, Sensation, and Mind) and it struck me as very important:

Quote

...the volitional mind takes cognizance of the Anticipations, that is, the innate ideas of justice, of the divine nature, and other such abstractions, and it puts to the test every law of the land to determine whether it harmonizes with the innate idea of justice.

The importance of this quote is its applicability to modern times since we are living in a culture of laws, for better or worse. The key anticipations mentioned of justice and divine nature are particularly important as they relate to the laws under which we currently live.

So I am curious to know what innate ideas are thought to be "justice" and "divine nature".

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**Post by “Don” of August 15, 2021 at 11:04 AM**

[Quote from EricR](#)

I am curious to know what innate ideas are thought to be "justice"

My understanding of the basis of justice is "to neither harm nor be harmed." This is the yardstick of determining an action is just or not.

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**Post by “Don” of August 15, 2021 at 12:13 PM**

### [Quote from EricR](#)

So I am curious to know what innate ideas are thought to be "justice" and "divine nature".

Sorry, realized I cut that quote off.

The innate idea of the "divine nature" is that it is "blessed" ([μακαριος](#)) and "incorruptible" ([ἀφθαρτος](#)). That's it. To assign any other characteristics goes beyond the anticipation from my readings.

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### **Post by “Joshua” of August 15, 2021 at 12:33 PM**

I think Don is on the right track. Principal Doctrine 31 makes the point explicit:

#### Quote

Natural justice is a symbol or expression of usefulness, to prevent one person from harming or being harmed by another.

And 24:

#### Quote

Those animals which are incapable of making covenants with one another, to the end that they may neither inflict nor suffer harm, are without either justice or injustice. And those tribes which either could not or would not form mutual covenants to the same end are in like case.

In light of this, "natural justice" is not to be confused with "Natural Law"; it is merely the sense of justice inherent to human nature. And yet even here there is hairsplitting, for though all humans likely possess this innate sense as an heirloom of our evolutionary past, it is quite possible to be conditioned by culture or circumstance *out* of a sense of justice.

Even in lower order animals we can see certain seemingly altruistic behaviors, like food-sharing, that hint at the development of this trait in humans.

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Divine Nature as an abstraction is also thought to be innate. Epicurus' evidence for this is the near-universality of belief among humans; even today, the rate of proper atheism among U.S. adults is something like 5 percent. There is a tendency among the non-religious to believe that religious belief at some distant epoch will at long last perish from the Earth, ushering in a golden age of...well, I don't know what exactly.

But if Epicurus is right, this is not to be hoped for. Like Sigmund Freud in his *Future of an Illusion*, Epicurus seems to have recognized that the religious sense is innate; like the sense of justice, it can be conditioned against by culture or circumstance, but on the whole our species is not likely to abandon it altogether.

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But here is where things get interesting; in the case of justice, Epicurus' account is descriptive, not normative. It tells us how things are, in other words; not necessarily how they should be. Primitive tribes whose culture or circumstance prevent them from exercising a sense of justice are not thereby unjust. In living without justice, they also *ipso facto* live without injustice. The words cease to carry any meaning or applicability for those peoples.

And this should be true of the divine nature as well. There will be those for whom the hypothetical objection imagined by Pascal is a truth to their own nature; "I am so made that I cannot believe."

Lacking a sense of the godly ought not make one ungodly, if the same is true of justice. It ought to be possible to, I might say, *sublimate* beyond the reach of the question altogether; to change one's state so completely that it no longer applies. But that's my argument, and not Epicurus'.

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## Post by "Cassius" of August 15, 2021 at 6:05 PM

Eric you have highlighted a passage in DeWitt that I agree is very important but where I have a different point of view than DeWitt:

### Quote

the innate ideas of justice, of the divine nature, and other such abstractions, and it puts to the test every law of the land to determine whether it harmonizes with the innate idea of justice.

In my view DeWitt would have been better off if he had not used the word "idea" here and had instead used a word like "principle." Not to split hairs, but i think to suggest that we are born

with fully formed "ideas" would be a form of Platonism that Epicurus was reacting against. DeWitt consistently points out how Epicurus is antiPlatonic in many areas, and he should have carried over that analogy more clearly in this area as well.

In my view, the anticipations have to be considered to be a "faculty" that is equivalent to the five senses and the feeling of pleasure. Faculties is a reference to mechanisms that work through principles, like eyes involve natural "physical" principles of optics and hearing involves natural "physical" principles of sounds. We are not born with "ideas" of shapes or sizes or colors, we are born with a faculty of sight which perceives those qualities about things when we "see" them through the physics involved in optics. We are not born with "ideas" of music or symphonies or claps of thunder, we are born with a faculty of hearing that perceives those things when we are exposed to the physical phenomena involved with sound, for the first time after birth. We are not born with feelings of pleasure in ice cream or pleasure in sex or pleasure in dancing, we are born with a faculty that perceives those pleasures through the physical principles involved in the way we are "wired" for pleasure and pain, when we experience those phenomena for the first time.

Likewise I think it is not correct to suggest that we are born with "ideas" of justice such as equality before the law or contracts or cooperation or teamwork. We are born with a faculty of perceiving that something called "justice" is involved in certain situations and arrangements when we perceive those arrangements for the first time. We are not born with an "idea" of a god being omnipotent or omniscient or even self-sufficient. We are born with a faculty of perceiving that there is a spectrum of perfection in living beings, and that as we come into contact with examples of living beings we can recognize that there is a way to rank living beings in terms of how successful they are in living.

I think that "ideas" as that term is generally understood (fully formed concepts) is very different from "principles" of operation of the faculties that nature gave us, which is all very "preconceptual."

So I think DeWitt is correct that anticipations are something we are born with, but instead of suggesting that they are "ideas" he should have suggested that there is a "faculty of anticipations" which involved physical principles of operation that dispose us to form concepts in certain ways in those areas of human life.

And in addition, it seems to me critical to observe that just as any single sight or hearing or touch may not be "true to all the facts" of what we are seeing or hearing or touching, just as Epicurus said in the letter to Menoeceus, it is possible for "anticipations" not to be true to the facts as well, as when people have anticipations about the nature of gods that are incorrect, such as when they think that the gods are like themselves. That means that there can also be anticipations of justice that can be incorrect, such as when we think that justice can or should be the same for all people at all times and all places, which Epicurus says specifically is not the case.

I recognize that my thoughts here are not fully-formed and are more assertions than something that can be considered firmly established, but this is personally how I think is the best way to extend the direction that DeWitt was correctly moving, but (in my humble opinion) did not state quite as well as he could have.

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### **Post by “EricR” of August 16, 2021 at 7:23 AM**

Great responses, guys, thanks! I find the concept of the Anticipations to be the most difficult to understand. Indeed for me, the notion that we are born with innate ideas makes no sense and I can understand its opposite, the blank slate.

However, as Cassius describes it as faculty or ability, I can start to get my head around it. The concept of "justice" is an awkward one to deal with because of the various ways it can be described. Look at the daily news to see what I mean. Which "justice" is actually just? This question will take us into endless conceptual debates.

When I've watched children at play and they get into a dispute over a toy, game, etc. I've witnessed the indignant retort, "hey, no fair!" This is usually the result of a desire being thwarted, but they don't say, "hey, I didn't get my want fulfilled!" or some childhood equivalent. They refer to something called "fair" that represents the feeling of their desire being denied. In other words, they sense innately that there was something unfair, or unjust, about the situation. Does this sound like the existence of an Anticipation of "justice"?

An example from our adult world is pornography. While definitions abound in trying to pin down what is pornographic and what is not, I can say with confidence that "I know it when I see it." While the context can vary historically and across cultures, I've often wondered if most people "know it when they see it" and then attempt to define it afterward. Is this an example of an Anticipation?

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### **Post by “Don” of August 16, 2021 at 7:40 AM**

#### [Quote from EricR](#)

Indeed for me, the notion that we are born with innate ideas makes no sense and I can understand its opposite, the blank slate.

I completely understand where you're coming from. However, the "blank slate" idea, while a popular and long-standing theory, has been well debunked. There is a lot of fascinating research on babies and toddlers.

#### [Quote from EricR](#)

When I've watched children at play and they get into a dispute over a toy, game, etc. I've witnessed the indignant retort, "hey, no fair!" This is usually the result of a desire being thwarted, but they don't say, "hey, I didn't get my want fulfilled!" or some childhood equivalent. They refer to something called "fair" that represents the feeling of their desire being denied. In other words, they sense innately that there was something unfair, or unjust, about the situation. Does this sound like the existence of an Anticipation of "justice"?

Excellent observation! This sense - anticipation - of "justice" or "fairness" has been observed in monkeys as well. I think I've posted elsewhere on there forum on this, but the one that comes to mind is the experiment where two monkeys are given a task and rewarded with a cucumber. However, as soon as one is rewarded with a "better" prize - fruit - the other monkey sees this and refuses to perform the task. I've seen videos of the "deprived" monkey throwing the carrot back at the researcher.

Here it is. Evidently he says they've done it with dogs and other animals:

<https://youtu.be/meiU6TxysCg>

That looks like a rudimentary anticipation of justice to me!

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### **Post by “Don” of August 16, 2021 at 7:50 AM**

Here's that full TED Talk:

<https://youtu.be/PnnSjdpBVw>

Be sure to watch to the end for an explanation of chimps refusing the grape until the other one gets one, too!

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### **Post by “EricR” of August 16, 2021 at 8:06 AM**

Thanks, Don. That is very helpful. Clearly, the important detail in all of this is differentiating between the sense or feeling of fairness and actual thoughts of it. My reference to the blank slate is related to the latter. What is blank are the actual ideas, thoughts, concepts, etc. that are later conceived via the interaction of the Anticipations with experiences. Am I understanding this correctly?

Now, how about "divine nature"? If we are not born with actual innate ideas, what is going on with this one? What is innate in us that refers to what we later define conceptually?

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 16, 2021 at 8:22 AM

My comment in response to the last two posts is that I would emphasize over and over that any single "anticipation" might be just as erroneous as any single glimpse by sight or hearing of the thing being considered. A faculty of being aware that "there's something here I need to pay attention to" does not tell you what you should "conclude" about it. I think that is the main issue that needs to be grappled with in discussing anticipations -- "faculties" are not omniscient or omnipotent and the immediate temptation to conclude "Nature tells everyone to be 'fair'" or "Nature tells us to punish the unjust" needs to be resisted because as Epicurus hammers home there IS no absolute just or unjust.

Then:

### [Quote from EricR](#)

While definitions abound in trying to pin down what is pornographic and what is not, I can say with confidence that "I know it when I see it." While the context can vary historically and across cultures, I've often wondered if most people "know it when they see it" and then attempt to define it afterward. Is this an example of an Anticipation?

I would say that yes this is quite possibly the faculty of anticipations at work. You recognize that there is an issue here that needs to be evaluated and dealt with, but you are not given at birth a "rule-book" written by a Censorship Committee of what is and is not acceptable. If you did not have some natural faculty disposing you to take notice of this issue, you would stare blankly at it and see nothing of significance to you any more than a grasshopper looking at a TV screen.

### [Quote from EricR](#)

What is blank are the actual ideas, thoughts, concepts, etc. that are later conceived via the interaction of the Anticipations with experiences. Am I understanding this correctly?

I agree with Don that the terms "blank slate" and even "blank" are not very useful at all, and as they ARE used by those philosophers who promote it, it is very damaging, because what they are indeed trying to do is erase all reference to natural faculties and dispositions, in favor of "logic" -- conceptual processing that they seem to believe is TOTALLY within our own minds and arrived at by our own thinking.

#### [Quote from EricR](#)

Now, how about "divine nature"? If we are not born with actual innate ideas, what is going on with this one? What is innate in us that refers to what we later define conceptually?

I would say that the [Velleius narrative in "On The Nature of the Gods"](#) is, as DeWitt suggests, an accurate version of Epicurus' views. We are born with a faculty that allows us to recognize higher and lower states of "performance" in living, and we are at birth wired / disposed to categorize ways of living as "more or less blessed" (or any similar superlative you want to use). As we grow older from day to day we are exposed to more examples of ways of living and our minds begin to classify them according to what we begin to conclude are better or worse. As we think about these ways of life we are exposed further to stories and natural scenery that inspire us to deeper and deeper thought. We are exposed to the idea that the universe is infinite and eternal and teeming with life. We are exposed to statues and artworks and depictions of divinity that others before us have conceived. And if you take Epicurus at his word, we are exposed to "images" that stimulate our minds directly (if you want to joke, like radiation from a cell phone, or radio reception through a tooth filling) to think further about these issues.

But despite all that, these things are not properly thought of as "innate ideas." We are not born Presbyterians or Islamists or atheists.

And to repeat my view is that it is very important to speak accurately and distinguish "the faculty of anticipations" which is like "the faculty of sight" as against "an anticipation" or "one or more anticipations" which is like saying "I observed elephants from a tour bus four times in my life." Those observations are extremely helpful, but they are raw data that must be processed into opinions, and once they become opinions, they are no longer strictly examples of anticipations. Your viewpoint of on whether you find elephants to be sympathetic and admirable creatures arises FROM your sensations of them in the past, and from the feelings of pleasure or pain you felt in regard to them, and from your anticipations by which you organized your views of their "justice" or "blessedness" or other abstract issues), but all of those you have

processed into opinions, and those are YOUR opinions, not handed to you in final form by Nature, and YOU have to take responsibility for the correctness of your personal conclusion to be a Nature Guardian or a Big Game Hunter. Others can decide whether to judge you positively or negatively as to which of those choices you take, but everyone (you, those who judge you - everyone) are just acting to the best of your abilities. Nature hasn't programmed any of you on the final conclusion you "should" reach. There's no heavenly ranking or Platonic realm list which tells everyone how to evaluate those things.

Even though I am disagreeing with him as to the word "ideas," I believe I am essentially following, and simply expanding, on DeWitt's perspective on all this. DeWitt knows much better than I do that there can be false anticipations, as cited in the letter to Menoecus. Once you incorporate into the big picture that no single anticipation can be considered to give you the "correct big picture," I think this "anticipations as a faculty that provides data that can be either 'right' or 'wrong' to the full facts" position is where you end up.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 16, 2021 at 8:33 AM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

But despite all that, these things are not properly thought of as "innate ideas." We are not born Presbyterians or Islamists or atheists.

Agreed. We are born humans, animals, and parts of the natural world.

I'll have more to respond to your other points later, [Cassius](#) .

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 16, 2021 at 8:35 AM**

Don looks like you were typing as I was writing post 10 so be sure you see it as now finished.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 16, 2021 at 8:43 AM**

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

there can be false anticipations, as cited in the letter to Menoecus.

Hmmm. The anticipations aren't false. It's the popular opinions of the gods that Epicurus takes issue with in the Letter:

### Quote

Impious is one who upholds popular beliefs about the gods, because those pronouncements are false opinions rather than actual preconceptions.

More later.

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## **Post by “EricR” of August 16, 2021 at 8:58 AM**

Ok, think I'm sloooooowly getting the idea here. The feeling that something is unfair is the operation of the faculty of anticipation while the actual thought of "this is unfair because..." is the operation of the rational mind. That mind can make mistakes due to personal issue, incorrect information, ideological bias, etc. But the original ability of sensing "something" unfair is the faculty in operation that requires interpretation.

Interestingly, I came across this picture this morning. I think it speaks to this question despite what I suspect is a religious origin.

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## **Post by “Don” of August 16, 2021 at 10:05 AM**

### [Quote from EricR](#)

Ok, think I'm sloooooowly getting the idea here. The feeling that something is unfair is the operation of the faculty of anticipation while the actual thought of "this is unfair because..." is the operation of the rational mind. That mind can make mistakes due to personal issue, incorrect information, ideological bias, etc. But the original ability of sensing "something" unfair is the faculty in operation that requires interpretation.

I would agree with that. That seems well stated.

That's where I'm uneasy about [Cassius](#) maintaining the anticipations are wrong or can be wrong, if I'm reading him correctly. My reading of Epicurus is that the senses are an accurate reflection of reality. They are "true." It's our opinions and beliefs branching off from our canonical faculties that are the problem and not the Canon itself. I think it's the same or similar with the anticipations (as implied by that quote from the Letter to M.)

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## Post by "Cassius" of August 16, 2021 at 12:01 PM



### [Quote from Don](#)

That's where I'm uneasy about Cassius maintaining the anticipations are wrong or can be wrong, if I'm reading him correctly. My reading of Epicurus is that the senses are an accurate reflection of reality. They are "true." It's our opinions and beliefs branching off from our canonical faculties that are the problem and not the Canon itself. I think it's the same or similar with the anticipations (as implied by that quote from the Letter to M.)

Yes this is the point we need to drill down on. I firmly think (and I think DeWitt says too) that any anticipation is always (1) reported truthfully - that's what makes it canonical, BUT ALSO - (2) need not be true "to all the facts" or "to the big picture" which is why we check one anticipation against another, just like we check one sight against other sights, one hearing against another hearing, etc .

This is EXACTLY the point that DeWitt goes into in regard to the multiple meaning of "[all sensations are true](#)" -- Yes they are reported honestly, but nobody ever said they are omniscient or "absolutely true" for everyone in the world. Each sensation and feeling of pleasure and anticipation are "reported truly to us" by the faculty that is involved, but that does not make it "true for everyone in the world." The only way we have confidence in predicting that the sensation/feeling/anticipation will remain true for us is by the REPETITION of receiving the same sensation in the same context.

This is a huge point so we need to stay with it til we all come to a clear understanding of the parts where we agree and the parts where we don't agree.

If we were to conclude that an "anticipation" were "completely true to everyone" -- such that our view of "justice" is the same for all people all times all places we would immediately be transformed into Platonists and that is exactly what Epicurus was warning against.

There is a strong tendency for us to think that "anticipations" amounts to "innate ethical conclusions" but I think that would be a disastrous conclusion and surely what Epicurus was warning exactly against.

I think we'll find these things borne out as we dig into the actual citations.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 16, 2021 at 12:04 PM**

#### Quote

[124] For the statements of the many about the gods are not 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. For men being accustomed always to their own virtues welcome those like themselves, but regard all that is not of their nature as alien.

This is the Bailey version, and it is my understanding that the word here listed as "false suppositions" is or is closely related to the prolepsis word. Let's dig into that, along iwth his "conceptions derived from sensation."

This takes us squarely into the "why is it called a PRE-conception vs a conception" argument.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 16, 2021 at 12:10 PM**

At the risk of quoting too long an excerpt, I need to insert here the reference I have cited before as I think articulating the best way forward in understanding the difference between an "innate idea" versus an "innate principle." This is from Jackson Barwis' book against John Locke's view of innate ideas, and it is the most clear presentation of this issue I have found. I think Barwis is essentially stating the position Epicurus was describing.

This also addresses the argument which immediately must be confronted by anyone who asserts that there are truly innate "ideas." They must be confronted immediately with the

question: "Well, then, give me a list of them!"

All this comes from Barwis's "[Dialogues On Innate Principles](#)"

Quote

Mr. Locke then, you know, returned I, has used several ways to prove that we have no innate principles: and though I clearly see that your arguments do make generally against them all; yet I shall be better satisfied if you will permit me to particularize some of them, if it be only to hear, from you, a refutation of them.

He bowed.

You know, continued I, Mr. Locke advances that principles cannot be innate unless their ideas be also innate. "For, says he, if the ideas be not innate, there was a time when the mind was without those principles; and then they will not be innate, but be derived from some other original. For where the ideas themselves are not, there can be no knowledge, no assent, no mental or verbal propositions about them."

Now is there nothing in what he advances in this place that will affect your doctrine of innate principles?

I think not, answered he.

For granting that we have no innate ideas, it is by no means from thence follow, as he says, then we have no innate principles. Ideas, simply considered, are very different things from innate moral principles, or from any other principles, which constitute the nature of things. If I have not already shown, I will, by and by, endeavor more clearly to show that the propositions we compose according to our idea of things are nothing but propositions; they are not really the principles of the things treated of: the principles of the things treated of are naturally inherent and exist perpetually in them whether our ideas or propositions concerning them be true or false.

But in the part quoted there is a fallacy. He says, "if the ideas be not innate, there was a time when the mind was without those principles." The conclusion, you see, is vague and delusive. The only just conclusion he could have drawn was, that if the ideas be not innate, there was a time when the mind was without those ideas, out of which the propositions are formed, which I call principles. I doubt not that you perceive they are very improperly so called in the present question. For Mr. Locke thus confounds the principles of our nature, and the ideas contained in the propositions he names, together, as if they were the same things: but they cannot be so, because the one receives existence from the prior existence of the other. That is, our moral ideas receive their existence from the prior existence of our innate moral sentiments or principles: as our ideas of light and figure are derived from the prior existence of sight.

In this question the matter, as too frequently happens, has been puzzled and obscured by the misuse of words. Axioms, and allowed propositions, are called principles. But they are only principles formed by the human mind, in aid of its own weakness; which, in reasoning, can proceed but a little way without proved or granted propositions to rest on. They might, perhaps, with much more propriety, be called helps, assistances, or supports to the imbecility of the human mind, than principles of things. The principles which naturally inhere in every species of created beings are of a nature entirely different.

It seems, then, said I, that you agree with Mr. Locke that neither ideas or propositions can be innate: but you differ from him by denying any propositions what so ever to be properly the principles of any species of beings; and by affirming that both speculative and practical propositions are mere creatures of human invention; which whether they be true or false, that is, founded in the nature of things or not, the true natures and principles of things remain unalterably the same.

That is my meaning, replied he, and that, therefore, most of the arguments advanced by Mr. Locke against innate principles are nothing, or but very little, to the purpose; because they only tend to combat things as innate principles which are nothing like innate principles; and, if it be not too bold a thing to say of so penetrating a genius, he seems only to have been fighting with a phantom of his own creating.

Indeed, highly as I think of his genius and integrity, I should have much doubted of his sincerity in this doctrine if we had not frequently seen men of the first rate abilities suffer themselves to be carried into great absurdities by their fondness for a favorite system, or, by too hasty a desire of forming a perfect one.

It is certain, however, that nothing can be more excellent than his work as far as it regards our manner of acquiring ideas by sensation and reflection. But what should move him to advance that we have no other way of acquiring ideas; why he should exclude our moral sense and deny even its existence with the pains of so much acute false reasoning, I shall not, at present, endeavor to explain. But having so determined, he found it necessary to remove all notions of innate moral principles (and with them, all other innate principles) out of the way, in the beginning of his book: for had they been granted, another source of ideas must have been admitted besides those of sensation and reflection as explained by Mr. Locke. And I shall not hesitate to affirm that a clear and indisputable explication of this mode of acquiring ideas would have cost him much more pains in trouble than all the rest of his most ingenious work. For human actions and opinions, in the ordinary course of things, pass away in so rapid a succession as to leave no lasting traces behind them; nothing fixed to which we may refer for a renewal or a correction of our moral ideas concerning them, if our memory prove deficient. And, unless they be recorded with extraordinary accuracy, they can

seldom be contemplated a second time in precisely the same light in which they were viewed at the first.

But all those ideas which arise in our minds by the impressions which external things make upon our senses being derived from objects of fixed and lasting natures, when our memory fails us, when we doubt the clearness or precision of our ideas, we can, generally, refer with ease to the objects themselves, and can renew, or rectify, our ideas at pleasure. This renders geometry so certain and indisputable as science: for the least variation or incorrectness in our ideas may be discovered and corrected by recurring to the figures themselves, which, through the medium of sight, convey invariably the same ideas to the mind. Nor is there any impediment, anything naturally interesting to our affections, in the nature of the things themselves, that should make us see them falsely or apply them irrationally.

But it is not so in moral science; it more closely concerns and is more deeply interesting to us in every point of view: it therefore throws more impediments in our way to a right understanding and clear comprehension of its truths. Our early-imbibed prejudices, misplaced affections, ill-governed passions, and jarring interests, distort and falsify our ideas in moral subjects extremely, nor can a just and natural representation of our moral sentiments or feelings take place in our minds until those delusive and turbulent enemies to moral truth be subdued or properly corrected. And also to men whose affections and passions are duly tempered, and minds naturally adjusted, moral truths may be as clear as mathematical ones, yet, from the unhappy circumstances above-mentioned, they are generally much more clouded and obscured; and are, therefore, perpetually subjected to tedious and unpleasant disputations: a very untoward and disgusting circumstance without a doubt.

But which you think, replied I, not enough so to have caused Mr. Locke to deny the existence of innate moral principles; things so essentially interesting to the calls of virtue: and which, you consider as a source of ideas, not comprehended in what he understands by sensation and reflection.

And are you not of the same mind, interrogated he, in a lively tone?

At present I am, answered I, but yet I must bid with Mr. Locke to be more clearly informed concerning the nature of those innate principles; for, says he, "nobody has yet ventured to give a catalogue of them."

By the demand of a catalog of them, said my friend, he seems only to expect a string of moral maxims or propositions: but these, we have agreed, with him, are not innate principles: we have agreed that they are not properly principles of things at all. But, before we attempt to explain farther what we mean by innate moral principles, it may not be improper to endeavor to define what we would be understood to signify by the

word principle, so far, at least, as it regards our present inquiry: and so, perhaps, when we come to speak of any innate principle, after describing it as well as we can, we may be allowed to say what Mr. Locke says of the faculty of perception, which I presume is innate, viz. "who ever reflects on what passes in his own mind cannot miss it; and if he does not reflect, all the words in the world cannot make him have any notion of it." So, our moral principles be innate, and of a simple nature, when we would describe the sensations or sentiments they produce in us; if by turning men's minds inward upon their own feelings we cannot make them perceive what they are, words in any other view will be vain and useless. Yet in essentials all men must be sensible of them, and capable of perceiving them, clearly enough, in plain, practical cases, for all the good purposes of human life: except, indeed, such persons as Mr. Locke very strangely, not to say preposterously, selects as the most likely to preserve a pure and perfect sense of them: viz. idiots, infants, and madmen.

He was going to proceed in the definition of his meaning by the word principle when finding we were just at home, he declined it to another opportunity; to which I assented, on a promise that it should be early next morning. And thus ended our first dialogue.

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## Post by "EricR" of August 16, 2021 at 12:26 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

This also addresses the argument which immediately must be confronted by anyone who asserts that there are truly innate "ideas." They must be confronted immediately with the question: "Well, then, give me a list of them!"

That is almost exactly where I was headed with my original post. When I read that passage in which DeWitt names "justice" and "divine nature" AND "other such abstractions" I took them to be named anticipations. So I wanted to understand what makes them so and then could we start sorting out (listing) others.

But I see I was making a mistake in being so specific. But I think Don has a good point about them being "always true" in their role as primary ways of knowing. If they represent principles incorrectly, in way that sight can be incorrect in the case of colour blindness, then the rational mind must be engaged to correct the perceptual error. I gather the anticipations must work the same way? They are considered true unless there is a known deficiency in function?

Boy, this is hard to sort through, at least for me. 😊

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 16, 2021 at 12:32 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

That's where I'm uneasy about Cassius maintaining the anticipations are wrong or can be wrong, if I'm reading him correctly.

So please help me be as absolutely clear on this as possible, and let's beat the point home like a drum:

No data (sensation?) from a canonical faculty is anything other than "reported honestly" so that data is always "true to us at that moment" in the sense that it is reported truly ("honestly," "without injection of opinion.")

But at the same time, no "data" / "sensation" from a canonical faculty is ever, in itself, a "concept" or an "understanding" -- it is always simply a "feeling" or a "bit of sensory data" that must be built up in the mind into words and concepts.

This is the trademark attribute of what it means to be a canonical faculty - they operate "automatically" without injection of "opinion" ("concepts") at any time.

No "concept" is ever "absolutely true" because concepts are constructions of the human mind and are not given us by gods or through ideal Platonic forms.

Therefore in human terms, the only test of "truth" is really "true to us" which is what we build up from the set of three canonical faculties.

Now another absolutely vital concept that we haven't stated so far in this conversation is that these attributes of the canonical faculties (that they are only true to the extent we reliably build them up from our canonical faculties) is not a defect or a limitation of something to go hide in our cave and cry about. This attribute that these are the only things that are reported to us without opinion mean that they are our most prized and vital possessions which we MUST use and we MUST rely on to form our own judgments about how to live and everything else that is important in life.

The Platonists and Religionists have backed us into the corner of thinking that only if a concept is absolutely true for all people, all times, all places is it worth anything. That is absolute RUBBISH and BS and needs to be treated as such. We have to seize the moral high ground and assert not only that we are firm in going with the conclusions that we draw from our canonical

faculties, but we absolutely reject and dismiss (probably even the Epicurean "spit on") the assertions of absolutely truth -- because they are childish fantasies and deserve to be treated as such.

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## Post by "Cassius" of August 16, 2021 at 12:37 PM

### [Quote from EricR](#)

But I see I was making a mistake in being so specific. But I think Don has a good point about them being "always true" in their role as primary ways of knowing.

Respectfully to all concerned let's state all this in a way that is more clear about the "always" and the "absolute" implications. I think the point Epicurus was making is that "YES - "anticipations" as a PRE-conceptual source of raw data are always reported "honestly," but "No! - anticipations are not themselves ethical conceptions / propositions and they are themselves never fully formed conceptions that are absolutely applicable in all circumstances!" 😊

Due to the nature of the universe (no gods, no ideal forms, nothing that is "always the same" except the fundamental elements themselves) **there is no way possible that any ethical concept can ever be absolute for all people, all times, all places.** That is in my view the clear meaning of the "justice" statements in the last ten PD's, but it's also compelled by the Epicurean physics. That's where DeWitt slipped (in my humble view) in describing anticipations as "ideas." They are used to FORM ideas, just like the data from all three of the canonical legs are used in our minds to form ideas, but they are not ideas themselves.

This is the point that was the fatal flaw in those who adopted a fourth leg of the canon (as cited in Laetius) and it's the flaw committed by Cicero's Torquatus in saying that he was one of those who believed that the proposition that pleasure is desirable should be the subject of essential logical proof.

What we're discussing here is what (in my opinion, I think following DeWitt) blew up the Epicurean movement in the ancient world. They gave in to the Platonists / Stoics and accepted the argument that their philosophy required proof through "logic" - when Epicurus told them that "logic" is not something that is canonical, and that proof comes through the natural faculties (data from all three canonical faculties viewed generally as "sensations") rather than through mental conceptions / logic.

I know pleasure because I can feel it, not because I can define it absolutely accurately in words. The same would go for all the inputs from all the canonical faculties. The data does not come to us in words/concepts, those are just devices that we use to try to describe them, but the words

are just devices. The words cannot be mapped one-to-one exactly to the full context of the experience.

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### **Post by “EricR” of August 16, 2021 at 1:09 PM**

Ok, there's quite a bit to digest here.

I will say this much. As I said at the beginning of this thread, I thought this was important because it "...puts to the test every law of the land to determine whether it harmonizes with the innate idea of justice".

To me, this means the anticipation of justice is key to those small things in our culture such as the legal system, laws, legislation, government power, etc.!!

In other words, the Anticipations as a key part of the natural ability to understand reality really, really, really matters. We need, at least, I need to get it clear and correct.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 16, 2021 at 3:28 PM**

I would say Eric just remember that formulation of absolute law in Cicero's Republic, and compare it to PD 30-40.

Epicurus stands for the proposition that there is no absolute justice or absolute ethical standards, other than pleasure and pain as the guide to all choices and avoidances.

That means that all subsidiary parts of the philosophy, including anticipations, point in that same direction.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 16, 2021 at 3:40 PM**

The follow up point Eric is that YES, it is through the anticipations of the people involved that they will reach their decisions as to what is just and what is unjust and they will work as hard as they can to implement those ideas.

BUT at the same time they must realize that the answer they reach to their questions is determined by a combination of their own circumstances plus the developed dispositions they bring to the table, and that there is no God, or Ten Commandments, or any other "supernatural" or "eternal" or even "Nature's Own Single Answer" justification for their decisions

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 16, 2021 at 3:42 PM**

This is the position Epicurus was fighting AGAINST, and so you can pretty much REVERSE this and see what Epicurus' position would have been in arguing that these things are impossible due to the nature of the universe. That means that these things don't exist anywhere, and we won't find them existing in anticipations either. Anticipations will be something different - a faculty that allows us to see the issues involved in justice, like an eye allows us to see trees. But in processing our conclusions about trees or about justice, all of that process is something the human mind does to the best of its own ability, and people aren't going to reach the same conclusions about justice any more than they are going to use the same words or even use the same language to describe trees:

<sup>10</sup> ZULUETA, *op .cit. supra* note 8, at 868 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Thus in his work *De Republica* (Bk. III, ch. 22), Cicero wrote: "Right reason is indeed a true law, in accord with nature, diffused among all men, unchangeable, eternal. By its commands, it calls men to their duty, by its prohibitions it deters them from vice. For the upright, it commands and prohibitions are not in vain, but neither by commanding nor by prohibiting does it move the wicked. To pass laws contrary to this law is impious, to derogate from it is unlawful, to do away with it is wholly impossible. Neither the Senate nor the people can dispense from it, nor is any ulterior expounder and interpreter to be sought for. There shall no longer be one law at Rome and another at Athens, nor shall it prescribe one thing today, and another tomorrow, but one and the same law eternal and immutable shall be prescribed for all nations and all times, and the god who shall prescribe, introduce and promulgate this law shall be the one common lord and supreme ruler of all, and whosoever will refuse obedience to him shall be filled with confusion, as this very act will be a virtual denial of his human nature; and should he escape a present punishment, he shall have to endure heavy chastisement hereafter." In the *Pro Milone*, he stated: "There is a law, judges, not written, but born within us, which we have not learned or received by tradition, or read but which we took in and imbibed from nature itself, which we were not trained in, but which is ingrained in us."

<sup>12</sup> For example, he wrote in his *Philippics* (xi, 12): "Law is nothing else than right reason derived from the gods, commanding what is honorable and forbidding the contrary."

<https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4104&context=ndlr>

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## Post by "Cassius" of August 16, 2021 at 6:16 PM

This continues to be a key passage too. To any question of whether Nature gives us any standard of conduct whatsoever, in the form of "ideas" "concepts" "justice" or whatever - there is only ONE answer: "What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance?" (and of course the answer implanted there is NOTHING)

### Quote

Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. These facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them. (For

there is a difference, he holds, between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder: the former is the method for discovering abstruse and recondite truths, the latter for indicating facts that are obvious and evident.) Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature.

What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance? Some members of our school however would refine upon this doctrine; these say that it is not enough for the judgment of good and evil to rest with the senses; the facts that pleasure is in and for itself desirable and pain in and for itself to be avoided can also be grasped by the intellect and the reason. Accordingly they declare that the perception that the one is to be sought after and the other avoided is a notion naturally implanted in our minds. Others again, with whom I agree, observing that a great many philosophers do advance a vast array of reasons to prove why pleasure should not be counted as a good nor pain as an evil, consider that we had better not be too confident of our case; in their view it requires elaborate and reasoned argument, and abstruse theoretical discussion of the nature of pleasure and pain.

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## Post by “Don” of August 16, 2021 at 9:43 PM

I have been [chomping at the proverbial bit](#) all day to respond to this thread.

It seems to me some things are getting conflated here, specifically Canonics and Ethics.

The Canon consists of three sources:

"In *The Canon* Epicurus affirms that our **(1) sensations** and **(2) preconceptions** and our **(3) feelings** are the **standards of truth**" (Diogenes Laertius, X.31)

- Sensations αἴσθησις are the sense-perceptions.
- Preconceptions/Anticipations are the infamous prolepses προλήψεις
- Feelings πάθη are pleasure and pain. That's it, two. "They affirm that there are two states of feeling, pleasure and pain, which arise in every animate being, and that the one is favourable and the other hostile to that being, and by their means choice and avoidance are determined." (DL, X.33)

The Canon is literally the yardstick, standard, ruler. It is the standard against which things - reality? - are measured. I'm interpreting some things posted here to say that everyone has their

own standard. No. I can't see how that can be correct. Everyone has their own **opinions, beliefs, interpretations, etc.**, but the *Canon* provides a standard against which those opinions and beliefs are measured. You can't say a belief or opinion is "empty" κενός if you have nothing against which to measure it. Otherwise, the Canon has no meaning. You can't say the standard is not a standard. That doesn't place a value judgement. If a belief does not START with a canonical sensation, preconception, or feeling, it's not a valid belief. Not all beliefs are equal. How else could you say that a belief that the gods influence my actions is vain/empty/κενός without referring to the yardstick/ruler/Canon?

The Canon provides no ethical or conceptual content. All the canonic faculties (I think that's a good word) function pre-conceptually. "Images" impact the senses. Preconceptions/anticipations are exactly that: they are "before concepts" or "anticipate" concepts. The feelings of pleasure and pain are automatic. We cannot (really) control whether we feel pleasure or pain. We can decide to endure pain as a choice. But we feel pleasure or pain prior to any conceptual understanding of it or "meaning" behind it.

As far as determining whether something is just or not, whether there is justice in a given situation, that is entirely a matter for Ethics and the social contract. The most basic social contract - according to Epicurus - is "to neither harm nor to be harmed." That's not the prolepsis of justice. Granted, I'm still wrestling with what the "Prolepsis of Justice" is, but I'm leaning toward it having to do something with those animal experiments, especially since their working out something preverbally and maybe preconceptually but rather instinctually. The "prolepsis of justice" will not "tell" us whether something is just or not. That's determined by the social contract of a particular time and place.

I'll stop there for now.

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## Post by "Cassius" of August 16, 2021 at 11:02 PM

These are good points to move the discussion along. Let me comment on them:

### [Quote from Don](#)

I'm interpreting some things posted here to say that everyone has their own standard. No. I can't see how that can be correct. Everyone has their own opinions, beliefs, interpretations, etc., but the Canon provides a standard against which those opinions and beliefs are measured. You can't say a belief or opinion is "empty" κενός if you have nothing against which to measure it. Otherwise, the Canon has no meaning. You can't say the standard is not a standard. That doesn't place a value judgement. If a belief

does not START with a canonical sensation, preconception, or feeling, it's not a valid belief. Not all beliefs are equal. How else could you say that a belief that the gods influence my actions is vain/empty/κενός without referring to the yardstick/ruler/Canon?

Let's start with that one: Yes I do think that everyone has there on sense of pleasure, and I think that is the easiest one to deal with. Some people find pleasure in many different ways -- do we agree on that?

If we do, then that's the first indication that a canonical faculty gives different results for different people.

Don't we also agree that people see colors in different ways (for example some are color-blind) and hear in different ways (some are "tone-deaf")? I think we'll agree there too.

As for anticipations, that's really the question we're discussing, so let's defer whether people have different instances of anticipations, though I will assert eventually that those differ too.

Where I think you are going, though, is that yes I agree that we can "generalize" and find that MOST people's sense of pleasure and pain, and their senses of sight and sound etc, do fall within ranges or bell curves or whatever. I would think that those "ranges" or "statistical probabilities" are what we are all thinking form the basis for our generalizations as to what is desirable and what is not desirable for most human beings.

But the real point there is that these are just generalizations, and they vary (sometimes dramatically) by individual, so while it is correct to say "generally" that most people (or most "Amerians") or most "men," or most of many other types of categories that we could come up with, do perceive things in a general way, that's pretty much the same as any other kind of statistical generalization. While yes that generalization does arise from nature, it's not really the kind of "absolute" standard at all that most people think about.

Now when we are talking about purely "mechanical" observations like length or width or weight or many many other things that can be "measured" yes we can come up with rulers and yardsticks and ways to measure them that are in fact 'objective' in way, but even there it is us (rather than nature) that is selecting an arbitrary standard to compare them against. Our confidence that those measurements always remains the same comes from the fact that we can reliably repeat them over and over and get the same result, not from any reference to an absolute standard "floating in the air"

[Quote from Don](#)

The Canon provides no ethical or conceptual content. All the canonic faculties (I think that's a good word) function pre-conceptually. "Images" impact the senses. Preconceptions/anticipations are exactly that: they are "before concepts" or "anticipate" concepts. The feelings of pleasure and pain are automatic. We cannot (really) control whether we feel pleasure or pain. We can decide to endure pain as a choice. But we feel pleasure or pain prior to any conceptual understanding of it or "meaning" behind it.

I think we are completely in agreement here, with the exception that pleasure and pain are the foundation of all ethical choices, and so I doubt that it is really proper to completely sever ethics from the canonical discussion.

#### [Quote from Don](#)

As far as determining whether something is just or not, whether there is justice in a given situation, that is entirely a matter for Ethics and the social contract. The most basic social contract - according to Epicurus - is "to neither harm nor to be harmed." That's not the prolepsis of justice. Granted, I'm still wrestling with what the "Prolepsis of Justice" is, but I'm leaning toward it having to do something with those animal experiments, especially since their working out something preverbally and maybe preconceptually but rather instinctually. The "prolepsis of justice" will not "tell" us whether something is just or not. That's determined by the social contract of a particular time and place.

I am pretty sure here is where we will disagree. First, I don't really think there is a sanction for saying that Epicurus really endorsed a 'social contract' in the first place, other than his observations that when people do agree not to harm each other, we can call that the foundation of any concept of "justice" that may exist. But he is also very clear that circumstances can and do change at a moment's notice, so that agreements which may have been "just" yesterday can become "unjust" today or tomorrow. And I think that just emphasizes the ephemeral nature of justice and that nothing is ever just in and of itself. He's really saying that any relationship that leads to the happiness of the person concerned with it may be considered just, but he's also saying that if we choose not to enter into any such arrangement (or for some reason we're not capable of it) there is no justice involved.

While it's possible to correctly generalize that most people in most situations benefit if they agree with each other, all those caveats to me simply emphasize that there is no such thing as absolute natural justice, social contract or not, so that the entire discussion just becomes another illustration that there is no such thing as absolute virtue (with justice simply being a subset of virtue).

As to this sentence "The "prolepsis of justice" will not "tell" us whether something is just or not. That's determined by the social contract of a particular time and place." I doubt I agree with that. I am thinking that would be better stated as something like "When I was a child I had four friends and the ice cream man gave us four ice cream cones so one of us didn't have one so we shared them equally anyway." I think that child found PLEASURE in seeing herself and all her friends get the same amount of ice cream. She found pleasure in that, however, only because her faculty of anticipations told her to recognize that there was an issue in everyone getting a a similar amount. Some of the other children could also have recognized the issue but thought "I am older so I should get more." And another one could think "I haven't eaten lunch so I should get more." And another one could think "I don't care what she thinks I am stronger and they depend on me so I deserve more." and many other possibilities could occur along the same lines.

In that scenario I would think that is an example that there is no natural sanction for a "social contract" for everyone to agree to divide equally, although that is ONE among several options that they could choose to follow. It was the sense of pleasure that ultimately provided the stop and go signal as each child evaluated (using their anticipations that there was an issue to consider) the situation that they might or might not choose to divide the ice cream equally. And to make Epicurus' point, they could choose to "agree" to divide it equally if they want, and they can call that "justice" if they want and "injustice" if someone breaks the agreement, but that ultimately if someone chooses to exit they agreement because it is no longer in their view mutually beneficial to them, they can simply choose to do so and no "injustice" is then involved. The word "just" becomes from that point of view as maleable as any other virtue - none of which are "absolute."

So ultimately I come down to the canonical faculty of pleasure as ultimately determining the "ethical choice" to be made. But it's also significant to note that no one would have ever even considered "ethics" to be involved at all if they didn't have an "anticipation" that "ethics" was a factor that they needed to consider as to how best to divide the ice cream. They could have, without that anticipatory disposition, just grabbed for all of the ice cream and each one tried to devour it all themselves just like we might say that a "savage" or some other primitive or hungry set of animals might do.

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## **Post by "Don" of August 16, 2021 at 11:34 PM**

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Some people find pleasure in many different ways -- do we agree on that?

We agree but it's irrelevant. The feeling of pleasure is the canonical faculty at work. We feel pleasure, then ask why that was pleasurable. Feeling, then reason. The action or thought or recollection that elicits a pleasurable feeling is then chosen or rejected to be engaged in again or not on the basis of that feeling. The feeling -- to be modern -- is a reflex response to a stimulus. Those endorphins are the same chemical reaction for all humans. We feel the pleasure before any "thinking" about why we felt it. That's why it can be a standard. It's a biological response not predicated on cognitive reasoning.

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

If we do, then that's the first indication that a canonical faculty gives different results for different people.

It seems to me you're conflating different "results" with different "feelings." There are different results because different people have different reactions to their feeling of pleasure. Pleasure is pleasure. Opinions about pleasure can be different. To use a metaphor: Fire can be used to burn a house down or cook your food. The results are different, but the nature of the fire remains the same regardless of the outcome. Same for pleasure.

This is a more in depth and fascinating discussion than I can handle at 11:30 pm. I promise I'll re-engage tomorrow. For now 🤔

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 17, 2021 at 5:35 AM**

I would say yes the faculty of pleasure is always the faculty of pleasure, but different people have different pleasure responses to exactly the same stimulus - and some people will find that exact stimulus painful. This means presumably that while it is fair to say that "pleasure" is the same faculty for all, there is no "objective" sense of pleasure that we can point to as leading to the same pleasure response in all situations, so we must always defer to the people involved and ask them "Do YOU find this pleasurable?"

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### **Post by “Don” of August 17, 2021 at 7:09 AM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I would say yes the faculty of pleasure is always the faculty of pleasure, but different people have different pleasure responses to exactly the same stimulus - and some people will find that exact stimulus painful. This means presumably that while it is fair to say that "pleasure" is the same faculty for all, there is no "objective" sense of pleasure that we can point to as leading to the same pleasure response in all situations, so we must always defer to the people involved and ask them "Do YOU find this pleasurable?"

Sure. But the pleasure response itself is the same. I'm not concerned at that initial point what causes it. Some people will be more sensitive than others, sure, more acutely aware of what their body is trying to tell them. Humans can even train themselves to disregard pain, for example. But the pleasure itself is the guide. Epicurus didn't posit different \*feelings\* - the "feelings" are two: pain and pleasure. Or are you referring to the katastematic and kinetic pleasures? But again that's only a distinction in where the pleasure comes from.

So, yes, the \*individual\* has to find an act or memory or sight pleasurable themselves and that is the guide to choices and avoidances/rejections for them. But the feeling of pleasure itself is a human/animal/natural reaction all humans/animals experience (unless there's a neurological disorder). That's why Epicurus could hold it up as a standard against which our decisions could be made. Otherwise, the idea of a \*canon\* is meaningless. The question has to be: Why is pleasure the yardstick by which we should make choices and rejections? Because it is a reliable yardstick by which our body - our nature - is telling us what to pursue and what to flee from.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 17, 2021 at 7:40 AM**

I think we can agree with all you wrote there yet we seem to be separate on something - and I perceive the issue is still the question of whether pleasure is in any sense "objective" across people(s) or is always a matter of individual perceptions.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 17, 2021 at 7:41 AM**

Aside: I hope everyone who feels they have anything productive to contribute will weigh in with comments or questions as we proceed beside that could certainly help.

## Post by "Cassius" of August 17, 2021 at 7:48 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

But the feeling of pleasure itself is a human/animal/natural reaction all humans/animals experience (unless there's a neurological disorder). That's why Epicurus could hold it up as a standard against which our decisions could be made. Otherwise, the idea of a \*canon\* is meaningless.

Ok I think we disagree there. I would say it is NOT the "everyone experiences it" that makes pleasure the standard but that FOR US these faculties are our only means of perception of reality which makes it the standard. 50 million Frenchmen are often "wrong" and while the experience of others is helpful to check out own predictions, it isn't the validation that comes from others concurring that makes pleasure the standard, but our own ability to verify through repetition that is our ultimate test.

No matter how many times and people I am told that spinach is pleasing, my reality will never agree with that.

I can admit that "spinach seems to be pleasant to most people, so I hear" but that is not and will never be the reality of my own pleasure. So my reality of pleasure disagrees with theirs , but I still assert that "pleasure" is the only standard of choice, because it is the only such faculty that we have.

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## Post by "Don" of August 17, 2021 at 8:01 AM

Oh! I think I see where we're talking past each other now.

I agree someone else's pleasure response is not a valid premise upon which to base MY choices and rejections.

If spinach doesn't give YOU pleasure, your body is telling you to avoid it - for now at least. It might be mental pain (some childhood memory affixed to spinach gives you pain) or biological pain (digestive issues?). You can always try again later \*IF\* you want to. Maybe you've heard it's healthy and you're willing to experience some pain now for pleasure (more health) later.

BUT \*every\* human and other animal has the experience of pleasure or pain by their very nature of being alive. You can see paramecia - one called "animals" - have a rudimentary pain/pleasure attraction/avoidance response to stimuli. It's Ancient! That's why Epicurus uses it

as a \*standard.\* By observation, he's seen animals react to things: they are either attracted to things for pleasure or flee from them if they cause pain. This is a reliable yardstick to listen to to decide your choices.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 17, 2021 at 8:44 AM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

I agree someone else's pleasure response is not a valid premise upon which to base MY choices and rejections.

That being said, Epicurus can still say that he doesn't encourage people to choose a "profligate" lifestyle of drinking bouts, etc. because - as a general rule - that leads to pain, sickness, ill health, loss of friends, insecurity, etc. by observation over time of many situations. BUT he's not going to forbid your choice to do that unless you would have tried to do it in the Garden and upset the community of friends within HIS home. He can make a choice that your behavior causes his friends and him harm, and therefore he can kick you out if he wants to until you can behave in a civilized - just - manner.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 17, 2021 at 9:27 AM**

Yes I think we are pretty close. It is possible to generalize, and generalizations are generally useful.

What I generally am fighting against is what I perceive to be also a "general" point of view of most people we run into in the outside world -- that there is some "objective" measurement to which all people should conform, including their view of whether something is pleasurable or painful.

I see this as another instance where it is necessary to simultaneously affirm two things that people think are in conflict:

(1) generalizations (about the sense of pleasure and many other things) are indeed generally useful as a matter of practice, so long as we acknowledge that they derive from the particular circumstances and people involved.

BUT

(2) Generalizations do not arise from supernatural means, nor is there a Platonic ideal or an Aristotelian "essence" by which anyone can say that there is only one "right" answer to a particular question.

The general tendency of people, due to religion and false philosophy, to embrace "objective" standards for all people at all times and all places is so strong, and so pervasive, and so insidious, that I think it is necessary to constantly "shout" that (like Diogenes of Oinoanda). As I experience life, in almost every conversation with the general world we can be sure that they are thinking that such an objective standard does exist. And they are presuming that we agree with them!

And this goes much further than basic pleasure sensations, but extends (because pleasures and pain are the starting point for all choices) into every ethical question as well.

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### **Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of August 18, 2021 at 10:41 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Likewise I think it is not correct to suggest that we are born with "ideas" of justice such as equality before the law or contracts or cooperation or teamwork. We are born with a faculty of perceiving that something called "justice" is involved in certain situations and arrangements when we perceive those arrangements for the first time. We are not born with an "idea" of a god being omnipotent or omniscient or even self-sufficient. We are born with a faculty of perceiving that there is a spectrum of perfection in living beings, and that as we come into contact with examples of living beings we can recognize that there is a way to rank living beings in terms of how successful they are in living.

I can agree with this. That we are born with something which is, please forgive the redundancy, innate, but not innate ideas. It's an innate "code" perhaps, which is recorded in us genetically, as Chomsky explains about how we as humans have an innate capacity (faculty?) to learn to use language, apparently automatically (when correctly stimulated), in forms that are not explicitly explained to us by anyone. If you've had kids you must remember this, when they surprisingly start talking in complex ways when nobody's taught them this specifically.

One of the reasons we use these pre-conceptions unconsciously must be because it's pleasurable to do so. Perhaps to be still pre-conceptions or anticipations they must remain unconscious? (They are pre-conscious? Anticipated to conscience?) As soon as they become conscious we

start trying to define them, or put names to them, when perhaps what would be more pleasurable would be to observe/experience them?

Perhaps they are part of the canon not so much "use them" as faculties, but rather just to be aware that they happen? (As complementary to the senses that we can choose to engage, and pleasure/pain we can use to discern good/bad)

Thanks to everyone for a great thread, it's been very illuminating.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 18, 2021 at 10:53 PM**

Yes I think "capacity" is another good word. It isn't fully developed at birth but improves with use and experience. And nobody forces us to use it - we can choose to ignore it. And it isn't some sort of infallible guide - we can still make mistakes in using it. All those things apply I think to what we're talking about.

And the reference to pleasure is a part I find fascinating too. Pleasure is where I think the deepest questions arise as to how that faculty came to be - because the others all seem to be channeling data to it, where alone the "stop" and "go" signals arise.

We know that all animate living things have these signals, and by recognizing them as canonical I think that means Epicurus recognized them as things which are inherent in us and simply have to be accepted as our stop and go signal from nature.

But it does strike me as a fascinating issue to consider the nature of pleasure and how it fits in with eternal / infinite universe and whether it therefore qualifies as the kind of "given" that arises just like life itself, etc.

But then overanalyzing it seems to be much of what Epicurus seemed to be warning against. Ultimately - whether we like it or not or analyze it or not - it's "the way things are."

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### **Post by "Godfrey" of August 19, 2021 at 1:22 AM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Pleasure is where I think the deepest questions arise as to how that faculty came to be  
- because the others all seem to be channeling data to it, where alone the "stop" and  
"go" signals arise.

This brings to mind the work of Lisa Feldman Barrett that [Don](#) and I have posted about previously. As I recall, she discussed in a podcast (I'm not sure if it's in her book) a million year old primitive life form as being a very early manifestation of the faculty. But she's not looking at the way Epicurus described things: modern neuroscience just seems to have a lot of overlap with his thinking.

In her book she describes "affect": a combination of pleasant/unpleasant and calm/agitation. She discusses the neural networks and systems involved, and the comparison to the Canon (with which she apparently is not familiar) is quite thought provoking.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 19, 2021 at 5:39 AM**

As to looking for a "first" or primitive form of life millions or billions of years ago I am always going to think that is the wrong approach from an Epicurean perspective. I think Epicurus would insist that there is life throughout the universe, and that the universe had no beginning date. So whatever he would point to as producing this mechanism, or to be it's key characteristics, I do not think he would think that to be time-dependent. I think the appropriate analogy would be that no matter how many monkeys and how many typewriters and how many years those monkeys would never produce the works of Shakespeare. I am thinking it's likely the discussion would be more on the lines of something swerve-like in the sense of "it must be there and be natural even though we don't yet understand the mechanism."

Of course I am very open to alternate possibilities including being completely wrong on my view there.

But I think any theory that posits a "first" is going to be incompatible, as would any theory that violates what we can glean from the views of "isonomia" and "nature never produces only a single thing of a kind."

That's why I think If we want to talk "soups" that is one thing, but simply assigning something to millions of years ago is not helpful. Where we are today is going to be "millions of years ago" when a couple more millions of years pass by.

### **Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of August 22, 2021 at 5:50 PM**

The last few days I've been thinking more and more about anticipations trying to understand them but also, I think, getting more my mind around what is it concretely we're talking about.

I liked thinking about them as a faculty. I've been pondering about how this faculty works, and I thought about it (thanks to others in this thread/forum) being the faculty to contrast "automatic" reactions - that we have towards and about things we experience and think about - to how we expect them to be; the expectation being the actual pre-conception, or anticipation, to the reaction and to our consciousness of it.

These expectations being formed both biologically (language) and psychologically, perhaps?

Does anyone have references to current divulgation of research about anything that could align to these anticipations of Epicurus?

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 22, 2021 at 7:27 PM**

I don't keep track of that myself but I think we've talked about that in the past so some here very well might.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 22, 2021 at 7:51 PM**

I still think Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett's work is an interesting possible modern interpretation of the anticipations. I think [Godfrey](#) mentioned her in this thread. If suggest taking a look at that discussion elsewhere on the forum.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of August 22, 2021 at 7:58 PM**

Here's one thread on her work:

Thread

## [How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain by Lisa Feldman Barrett](#)

This book is about the “theory of constructed emotion,” which is based in experiments and research.

My goal in reading the book was to explore whether current neuroscience can add any clarity to the *prolepseis*, as there is so little remaining text concerning them. What I found is that it actually is relevant to the entire Canon. Though the subject of the book is emotions, it also covers sensations and feelings as well as what I think we can interpret as *prolepseis*. Note that although the author...



Godfrey

April 15, 2021 at 8:28 PM

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of August 22, 2021 at 8:09 PM**

In the past I've also been interested in the writing of Sarah Williams Goldhagen regarding embodied cognition. But she, as I recall, is a design critic. LFB is a neuroscientist and is more on point.

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### **Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of August 22, 2021 at 9:21 PM**

I'm reading the passage of DRN where Lucretius talks about the cow and how she feels the loss of her calf.

Is this an example of an anticipation or pre conception? I'm pretty sure he's not talking about platonic motherly love. So why does the cow feel that, if not because - biologically - all animals have this pre conception that causes them pain... or - psychologically - both mothers and some males form this anticipation somehow?

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of August 23, 2021 at 1:06 AM**

That's an interesting question. On first pass I would say that it's the feeling of pain, and it's a good illustration of why sometimes we would choose to sacrifice ourselves because the pain of sacrifice would be less than the pain of seeing our child suffer.

On second pass, however, there is sensation and preconception involved, as well as feeling. Feelings don't just arise out of nowhere! So this is a good way to examine what a preconception might be in a particular instance. Would the preconception be a non-conscious expectation of a continuing relationship with the calf/child? I think that this begins to point out the "non conceptual" nature of a "preconception." In modern terms it might be called a non-conscious mental model arising from a non-conscious prediction loop, at least to my meager understanding.

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**Post by "Cassius" of August 23, 2021 at 6:52 AM**

Yes I think it's probably true that a faculty of anticipations is involved in the assembly of pretty much all thought, in the sense that we would not recognize the subject as significant to us at all if we didn't have such a wiring to recognize it. The continuing hazard is to think that a particular idea is preprogrammed rather than simply "wiring" that if we choose to use it and if it is functioning correctly (we're not sick or insane) will allow us to be conscious of something to think about and eventually firm ideas in. And that's why I still like preconceptions as a word to emphasize the PRE part.

When I think anticipation I can't help thinking of Carly Simon!

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**Post by "Cassius" of August 23, 2021 at 7:14 AM**

I think we're most all in agreement that we are not born with fully formed ideas. Aristotle and Locke assert that if we aren't born knowing ideas we are essentially a "blank slate" and that's going way too far.

I think the better analogy is that while we agree we aren't born with fully formed ideas, we aren't born as nothing more than a pure white piece of paper. We're actually built with a superior version of a computer operating system (think Windows or Linux or Mac) that when operated can process data in amazing ways, but only on the basis of the ultimate programming of the system (dogs and cats and humans and grasshoppers are programmed differently). We aren't born with a stored database of knowledge, but we are born with an operating system and

a series of peripherals (the senses), using the data from which a database can be constructed after conception and early development.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 23, 2021 at 7:20 AM**

I think the senses leg of the canon well fits the "computer peripherals" analogy, and the anticipations leg fit the "operating system" analogy. It's less clear to me where the pleasure /pain fits, possibly as part of the operating system but perhaps more the "applications program" or the electricity or something analogous to the purpose for which the computer and operating system were constructed.

In real life all these three operate very closely together too so it's not like they are entirely separate from each other and this is another area I think DeWitt's ideas are good.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 23, 2021 at 7:39 AM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

It's less clear to me where the pleasure /pain fits,

The on/off switch?

Just a reminder to not let our metaphors run away with our philosophy. (I know I'm guilty of this sometimes! Shoehorning a metaphor to fit the philosophy probably does a disservice to both).

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 23, 2021 at 8:30 AM**

Possibly the on / off switch, because that's a good analogy to stop and go, but I'm not sure that goes far enough.

The whole analogy of humans / living things to robots is probably both useful and dangerous at the same time, but then again that seems to be the whole situation with logic itself, so we've

got to get used to that and be comfortable articulating the good and bad of it. I think that's pretty much "got to be" the approach Epicurus took.

We can't label "all abstractions are bad" - that would be ridiculous, but at the same time have to be just as firm that "the map isn't the territory itself."

Cliches can be tiring but I think assembling a list of them would probably help us talk about the subject and explain it more clearly.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 23, 2021 at 8:37 AM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

"the map isn't the territory itself."

That is an excellent point to remember. Thanks for that!

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 23, 2021 at 11:52 AM**

Maps may be one of the best analogies, in addition to the compass.

Maps can obviously be very useful, and maps can be useful at many levels of detail. Sometimes great detail helps, sometimes it is best to take to 30000 foot view, but they all need to be consistent with the facts.

On the other hand no matter how detailed the map never becomes the terrain itself.

I think DeWitt talks about this in terms of the telescoping levels of outline, with Epicurus' 40 doctrines perhaps the highest view, then the letters, then I think there was another summary level that Lucretius used or else he was using the full 38? Books of On. Nature.

Regardless the telescoping view analogy seems very valid, and explicitly what Epicurus referenced as outlining in the letter to Herodotus.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of August 23, 2021 at 1:22 PM**

Quote from Cassius

When I think anticipation I can't help thinking of Carly Simon!

I tend to think of The Rocky Horror Picture Show 😊

The entire operation of a computer is based on 1 and 0, which might be equated to pleasure and pain. Or not.

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### Post by “Cassius” of August 23, 2021 at 1:56 PM

I am going to try to make some comments and point us to the reading material in this post here. It's been a long while since I read this myself so I am going to put a priority on rereading it now. (Yes Don, even before I finish reading Sedley's work on Lucretius! There is too little time!!!)

If anyone gets started ahead of me please post in that thread (the link that follows) and let's try to prompt each other to deal with those issues soon:

Post

**[RE: "On Methods of Inference" - Best Source for the Text And Getting Started](#)**

The beginning sections of the text are not preserved, and therefore we don't have the opening explanation for what the work is about in order to serve as a guideline for what follows.

Perhaps even worse, the work includes lots of repetition of positions that Philodemus is arguing \*against\*, so it's necessary to know beforehand which side of the argument Philodemus is taking so that you know if he's talking about his side, or that of the (largely stoic) enemy.

And perhaps even worst of all, the...



Cassius

August 23, 2021 at 1:55 PM