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EPICUREANISM AND MOLYNEUX’S QUESTION

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Locke, Molyneux, and Epicureanism: Why?

When scholars attempt to find ancient traces of the Molyneux problem, and of the Lockean epistemological perspective in which the problem is inscribed, they almost always refer to Aristotle\(^1\) and, less frequently, to Cicero and the Stoics.\(^2\) The reference to Aristotle is easy to explain because the problem of Molyneux originates from the problem of common sensibles, originally an Aristotelian concept, later adopted by Locke:

> The ideas we get by more than one sense are of space, or extension, figure, rest, and motion; for these make perceivable impressions, both on the eyes and touch: and we can receive and convey into our minds the ideas of the extension, figure, motion, and rest of bodies, both by seeing and feeling.

*Locke 1975: II, ch. 5*

According to Aristotle,\(^3\) there are sensible objects that belong exclusively to one organ of sense (such as color for the eyes and sound for the ears) and common sensibles, perceptible by more than one sense (such as movement, figure, number). Locke, as we’ll see later, inherits this theory. The second reference to Cicero and the Stoics concerns the philosophical conception that constitutes the critical target of Locke’s empiricism, “the problem of innate ideas,” of which Cicero and the Stoics would, for some, be “the founding fathers.”\(^4\) This\(^5\) is the background to the Molyneux question and is, in a way, its presupposition. If Locke had not been a strong critic of innate ideas, if he had not conceived the mind before experience as a *tabula rasa*, the problem of Molyneux would not arise.

Despite the relatively obvious conceptual legacies from which it derives, the problem of Molyneux is and remains a modern problem which, as many scholars have shown,\(^6\) finds its sources in the philosophical and scientific context of the time in which it was born. The aim of this study does not lie, therefore, in the search for new influences or filiations between the philosophical-cultural context in which the problem was conceived and ancient philosophical theories. Rather, it compares the theories that constitute the conceptual basis of the problem, those of Locke’s epistemology shared by Molyneux, with the theories of another older epistemology, that of Epicurus and Lucretius.
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Why Epicurus and Lucretius? Certainly, there are similarities between Locke’s and their conception of cognitive processes, in particular, because of the central role that experience plays in both systems. The two philosophers share the idea that all knowledge comes from the senses and the processing of perceptual material. This is particularly interesting with regard to the problem of Molyneux, where it is precisely experience or rather different forms of experience, tactile and visual, that are the heart of the problem. Such issues are also examined and discussed by the Epicureans, as this passage from Lucretius’ poem *On Nature* shows:

Here is a further point: when we handle an object of a particular shape in the dark, we recognise it as having the same shape that we see in the brilliant light of day. Therefore, touch and sight must be effected by the same cause. Now then, if we feel a square object in the dark and receive the impression of a square, what in the light will be able to give us the visual impression of a square, except the image of the object? It is evident therefore that images are the cause of vision, and that without them nothing could be seen.


Despite the obvious differences due to the different historical-philosophical contexts to which they belong, it is useful to compare the “empiricisms” of the two philosophers to better understand the specificity of Locke’s empiricism and the theories that constitute it and that eventually differentiate it from Epicurus’. I chiefly aim to answer two questions: (a) how would Epicurus have responded, based on his epistemological theories, to Molyneux’s question: in the same way as Locke and Molyneux or differently? (b) And in the first case: for the same reasons or different reasons?

To do this, I will attempt to analyze Locke’s response to the Molyneux problem in the light of the theories that the two thinkers shared by comparing them with the “corresponding” Epicurean doctrines. In the first part, I examine the Lockean theory of common sensibles concerning the quality of form and the Epicurean theory of the senses. In the second part, I analyze the theories of the two philosophers which explain the perception of three-dimensionality.

**The problem of form**

Molyneux presents the problem to Locke in two different versions. In the second version, shorter, the author writes:

Suppose a man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a Cube, and a Sphere of the same metal, and nightly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and t’other, which is the Cube, which the Sphere. Suppose then the Cube and Sphere placed on a Table, and the Blind Man to be made to see. Quaere, Whethyer by his sight, before he touch’d them, he could now distinguish, and tell, which is the Globe, which the Cube.

*Locke 1975: II, ch. IX, §8*

As we know, Molyneux’s response was negative:

Not. For, though he has obtained the experience of how a globe, how a cube affects his touch, yet he has not yet obtained the experience, that what affects his touch so or
so, must affect his sight so or so; or that a protuberant angle in the cube, that pressed his hand unequally, shall appear to his eye as it does in the cube.

Ibid.

Locke’s was equally negative but more nuanced:

A person born blind would not be able to say immediately with any certainty which was the sphere and which the cube.

Ibid.

Now, to understand this answer, it is necessary to analyze the main parts that constitute the problem: the problem of form and the problem of three-dimensionality. As we have seen, the problem mainly concerns the ability of a blind born person to recognize the shape of an object by sight, an object previously known only by touch. The first element to consider is, therefore, the perception of form and the explanation that Locke gives of it. According to the English philosopher, who follows in the footsteps of Aristotle, there are simple ideas\(^8\) that can only be grasped by a sense such as color for the eyes and sound for the ears. This means that for a person born blind or deaf the idea of color or sound will be totally inaccessible. There are also simple ideas that can be grasped by several senses, as Locke writes in this French extract of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*:

Outre cela il y en a d’autres [idées] qui viennent à l’Esprit, par plus d’un sens, comme le mouvement, le repos, l’espace, les figures, qui nous viennent par la Vue et par l’Attouchement.

Locke 1688: 52\(^9\)

In the case of colors and sounds, the problem of people born blind or deaf who subsequently gain their abilities does not arise: having never had access to color and sound, these experiences will be totally new once hearing and sight are gained. But in the case of form? Since form is a simple idea, passively perceived through experience alone, and since both sight and touch are ways of accessing its perception, is it possible that the first visual perception of a form, previously known through touch, allows the sentient subject to recognize it? Is the intermodality of this sensitive quality sufficient for its recognition?

This seems to be the first difficulty from which the problem of Molyneux arises. If the shape of an object is accessible to sight and touch, since the shape is common to both senses, it should be possible to switch from one sensory mode to another without there having been a simultaneous experience of the two sensations previously. But as we’ve seen, that is not the case according to Molyneux or according to Locke. Before investigating the other parts of the problem that explain Locke’s negative answer, let me compare this theory of common sensibles with the Epicurean theory of sensation.

The first element to take into account is that there is no Epicurean theory of common sensibles. The Epicurean theory of the senses is based mainly on the theory of *eidola/simulacra* and pores\(^10\) and the theory of the fourth nameless nature (*quarta natura vacans nomine*).\(^11\) The first theory explains the functioning of sight, smell, hearing and, in part, taste. The second theory explains the functioning of all senses, including touch. About the *simulacra* or *eidola*\(^12\) of sight, Epicurus\(^13\) writes:

Moreover, there are delineations which represent the shapes of solid bodies and which in their fineness of texture are far different from things evident. For it is not impossible
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that such emanations should arise in the space around us, or appropriate conditions for the production of their concavity and fineness of texture, or effluences preserving the same sequential arrangement and the same pattern of motion as they had in the solid bodies.

_Hdt §46. Tr. Long and Sedley 1987: 72_

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Sight is the result of the detachment from solid bodies of _simulacra_ or _eidola_, that is, of very thin and very fast atomic films that enter the eyes through pores suitable for their shape and size. The fact that the pores are suitable for _simulacra/eidola_ of sight is a fundamental element of the theory. This is what allows the senses to access only their own sensibles and not to grasp other forms of emanation. In fact, Epicurus explains the senses of smell and hearing in the same way: there are atomic emanations of different shapes, compositions, and sizes coming from solid bodies. In the case of taste, the explanation is slightly different because, unlike what happens in the case of sight, smell and hearing, the perception takes place in the mouth, in direct contact with (the pores of) the organ of sense. This external stage, so to speak, is followed by an internal one. Once the emanations have penetrated the body through the pores, the _simulacra/eidola_ touch and set the soul in motion. That’s where the fourth nature theory comes in:

At death a sort of light breath impregnated with heat leaves the body, and heat draws air with it; indeed, there is no heat that is not impregnated with air, because the rarity of its substance means that it must be interpenetrated by many primary particles of air. Already, then, the substance of the soul has been found to consist of three elements. But a combination of these three is not sufficient to produce sensibility, since the mind refuses to accept that any one of them is capable of producing sensory motions and the thoughts that it itself revolves. Therefore, a fourth element must be added to their number. This is entirely nameless.

_DRN III vv. 234–242. Tr. Smith 2001_

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According to Epicurus and Lucretius, the soul would be composed of four different elements: heat, breath, air, and a fourth nature without a name. This unknown nature, more subtle and mobile than any other existing nature, explains the existence of thought and sensation, which are phenomena that could not be produced by the other three elements. The fourth nature set in motion by the _simulacra/eidola_ touches and sets in motion the heat, the breath, and the air and then all the materials that make up the body or a part of it, in a sort of chain reaction. In this way, Epicurus and Lucretius also account for the touch which occurs through external and direct contact (and not through emanation and penetration) between a solid body and a sentient body and does not need to be explained as sight, smell, hearing, and taste.

Now, as we have seen, every sense has its structure (i.e. the conformation and position of its pores) to which corresponds a specific sensible and which does not allow it to grasp the other sensibles. Nevertheless, there is consistency between perceptions:

Here is a further point: when we handle an object of a particular shape in the dark, we recognize it as having the same shape that we see in the brilliant light of day. Therefore, touch and sight must be effected by the same cause. Now then, if we feel a square object in the dark and receive the impression of a square, what in the light will be able to give us the visual impression of a square, except the image of the object? It is evident therefore that images are the cause of vision, and that without them nothing could be seen.

_DRN III vv. 230–239. Tr. Smith 2001_
Lucretius’ objective in these verses is clear: to defend the idea that sight is produced by the penetration in the sensory organ of a part of the perceived object. In other words, we can perceive the shape and the color of the object because it is the object itself or at least a part of it, its surface, that “meets” us. The poet demonstrates this by using an example: we can recognize in the form of a solid body perceived in the dark by touch the same shape that we perceive with our eyes in sunlight. This is possible because, in reality, the perceived object, that is the surface composed of atoms positioned in such a way as to create a certain shape, is the same. The only difference is that touch perceives it by direct contact, with the hands for example, and sight perceives it because this surface detaches itself from the body and penetrates the eyes. This aspect is fundamental for the epistemology of Epicurus, which is based on the absolute reliability of the senses, whose product is always true. To avoid any risk that the truthfulness of the senses be questioned, the perceptive representation produced by each sense must derive, without medium, from the contact between the organ of sense and the perceived object, in this case the emanation of its surface.

In the problem of Molyneux, we find a situation very similar to that presented in Lucretius’ problem. The difference lies in the fact that his verses do not clearly say, as Molyneux does, whether the experience described is preceded by a simultaneous tactile and visual experience of the object. In other words, Lucretius does not say if this recognition is possible because the sentient subject already possesses a multisensory knowledge of the object. The aim of these verses is to demonstrate that sight is a kind of “remote touch,” but there is another interesting element of the theory in this example. According to Lucretius, the quality of form is inherent in the object. But, as I mentioned earlier, there is no Epicurean theory of common sensibles. This same quality is perceived in different ways by different structures. The perceptive representation is, therefore, specific and proper to the organ that produced it, even though the quality is inherent to the object and apprehended by more than one sense. The question is: since the quality of form is inherent to the object, is visual recognition of the object, based on previous tactile experience, possible in Epicurus? I will return to this question but first I must analyze the second part of the problem.

The problem of three-dimensionality

As aforementioned, form as a simple and common idea between sight and touch does not seem to be a sufficiently valid reason to justify Locke and Molyneux’s negative response to the problem; on the contrary, it justifies a positive response. As has been recognized by more than one scholar, the problem seems to concern not so much the perception of the form itself, but the nature of the form perceived by sight and touch.

In the following paragraph, in the Essay, Locke explains how simple ideas from experience can often be confused in the intellect by judgment. The example chosen by the English philosopher is sight, about which he writes:

From that which is truly variety of shadow or colour, collecting the figure, it makes it pass for a mark of figure, and frames to itself the perception of a convex figure and an uniform colour; when the idea we receive from thence is only a plane variously coloured, as is evident in painting.

Locke 1975: II, ch. IX, §8

According to Locke, sight has access to the form but only to the two-dimensional form of a body. This means that the blind born man, once his sight is restored, would not see a sphere and
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a cube on the table but a circle and a square. The passage from two-dimensionality to three-dimensionality would occur thanks to habit, that is, thanks to the repeated and simultaneous experience of sight and touch. This habit would allow the individual to “learn” the correspondence between the two-dimensional figures perceived by sight and the three-dimensional forms perceived by touch. This explains why a man born blind who gained his sight, would not immediately be able to associate the visible form, circle and square, to the touched form, cube, and sphere.

I now move to Epicurus. Is the three-dimensionality of solid bodies, as in the case of Locke, the fruit of habit or is it a datum immediately provided by the senses? On this point, as explained above, Epicurus already stated that *eidola* reproduce the concavity of solid bodies, but Lucretius gives us more information in three related passages:

Images are sort of membranes stripped from the surfaces of objects and float this way and that through the air.

*DRN IV vv. 31–32, Tr. Smith 2001*

[…] I contend, then, that things emit filmy forms and images from their surfaces; and the proofs that follow will enable even the dullest wit to understand that I am right.

*DRN IV vv. 41–44, Tr. Smith 2001*

[…] In the first place, many things visibly discharge matter. Some of these discharges are rare and diffused, like the smoke emitted by wood or the heat by fire; others are of a closer and denser texture, like the sleek coats that cicadas periodically shed in summer, or the superficial membranes of which newborn calves divest themselves, or again the venture that the slippery serpent works off on the thorns as is evidenced by the familiar sight of brambles decorated with its nuttering slough.

*DRN IV vv. 56–62, Tr. Smith 2001*

In these verses, Lucretius’ objective is to defend the theory of *simulacra*. In line with the Epicurean strategy, he invites his reader to observe nature: all bodies produce matter, fire emanates smoke and heat, cicadas abandon their “tunics,” and snakes, their old skin. In the same way, materials continuously flow out of solid bodies. The examples provided by Lucretius, especially those of the cicada and the snake, evoke the idea of three-dimensional membranes, i.e. films that come from the whole body and that reproduce their shape while retaining their depth. Confirmation of this can be found in paragraph 48 of the *Letter to Herodotus*, where Epicurus writes, to explain the rapidity in the formation of *cidola*, “they do not need to be filled out in depth.”

The *eidolon* has a depth, the same as the solid body to which it belongs, but being only its outer membrane, once detached it remains empty inside. This is one of the reasons, according to Epicurus, for the rapidity of its formation. Unlike Locke, according to Epicurus the three-dimensionality of bodies is a datum provided immediately by visual perception and not the product of a habit. As we have seen, the “formation” of visual three-dimensionality seems to be the main reason for Locke’s negative answer to Molyneux’s question. Does this mean that Epicurus would have answered Molyneux’s question “Yes”? I don’t think so.

**Epicurus and Molyneux**

As I showed in the second part of this article, Epicurus conceives a theory of the senses that harnesses, so to speak, the senses to their sensibles and guarantees their exclusive relationship.
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Each sensory organ has its own structure suitable for the reception of a given type of sensible. Although many qualities are inherent to a body, each sense receives only one “aspect” of this body. Now, the question is: does the fact that the different aspects of the body are inherent to the same object (as is the case with the shape of an object for sight and touch) mean that a quality perceived by one sense can automatically evoke to the soul the same quality perceived by another sense? The texts rule out this possibility for two reasons. The first is related to the non-“communication” between the senses.\footnote{35 As Lucretius clearly states:}

Or can sight be corrected by hearing, or hearing by touch? Can the evidence of touch be challenged by taste, refuted by hearing, or invalidated by sight? Not so, in my opinion. The fact is that each sense has its own special sphere, its own separate function. Thus, the discernment of softness, cold, and heat must be the province of one particular sense, while the perception of the various colours and everything connected with colours must be the business of another. Taste too has its own distinct function; smell is produced separately, and so is sound. It necessarily follows therefore that one sense cannot refute another.

\textit{DRN IV vv. 486–497. Tr. Smith 2001}

Since the structure of the senses is suitable for only one specific type of sensitive quality, one sense cannot confirm or correct the perceptual material captured by another sense. This means that the senses cannot contradict each other. This is a fundamental element of Epicurus’ epistemological theory because it constitutes his main weapon against sceptical challenges. The multiplicity of the senses and their ability to describe different aspects of a body is often the first step in questioning the truthfulness of the senses. It is no coincidence that this type of approach can be found in the Pyrrhonist Sextus Empiricus in the famous example of the apple:

Each of the objects of perception which appears to us seems to impress us in a variety of ways – for example, an apple is smooth, fragrant, sweet, and yellow. It is unclear, then, whether in reality it has these qualities alone, or has only one quality but appears different depending on the different constitution of the sense-organs, or actually has more qualities than those which are apparent, some of them not making an impression on us.

\textit{Sext. Emp. HP I, 94. Tr. Annas & Barnes 1994: 26}

The argument of the sceptical philosopher continues with the example of a deaf and blind man for whom solid bodies have only three “types” of quality, the only ones he can perceive. The objective is clear: the true scope of the senses is doubtful since their access to reality could be partial and “deformed” by the structure that constitutes each of them.

Although Sextus wrote this a long time after Epicurus’ death, this type of argument was very common at the time of the birth of the Garden. Epicurus opposed to it total confidence in the senses as the only access to reality: since the activity of the intellect is based on the material provided by the senses, if this is considered fallacious, the mind will not be able to defend itself or correct senses and the subject would, therefore, remain in a situation of impasse.\footnote{34 It is therefore not possible to doubt the senses since there is no other cognitive criterion that could replace them. Nevertheless, to strengthen this trust, the master of the Garden eliminates or attempts to eliminate all the factors that could weaken their effectiveness. An example of this is the aforementioned theory of emanations that involves the elimination of any possible medium between the sense and the sensible, which would only threaten the truth of the senses.}
by distancing them from the objects they perceive. Another strategic move of Epicurus is to exclude any possibility of contradiction or correction between the senses. As Lucretius adds at the end of the verses cited, not only can the senses not correct each other, but in addition “it is also impossible for any sense to correct itself.” As he had previously specified about the example of the moving shadow we see behind a body and which might be taken to be an illusion:

However, in this connection we do not allow that the eyes are in any way deceived. Their business is to observe the areas of light and shadow. But the question of whether the light is the same or not, and whether it is the same shadow passing from place to place, or whether the position is rather as I have stated it above this can be decided only by the reasoning of the mind.

DRN IV vv. 379–387. Tr. Smith 2001

According to Lucretius, the sensations, even those that derive from the same sense, do not have the ability to confront, correct or contradict themselves. This happens for two reasons. The first is that the sensations are equivalent: there is no reason why one sensation should have more value than another. The other reason is that the sensations have immediate validity and no memory. This is well described by Diogenes Laertius who, in the tenth book of the Lives of the Philosophers, devoted to Epicurus, writes:

All sensation, he [Epicurus] says, is irrational and does not accommodate memory, for neither is it moved by itself, nor when moved by something else is it able to add or subtract anything. Nor does there exist that which can refute sensations: neither can like sense refute like, because of their equal validity.


The feeling is without memory and irrational, or rather a-rational. This means that, as Long and Sedley point out, “unlike the Stoics, Epicurus is insistent that sensations are entirely irrational events, involving no interpretation at all.” Sensation consists in setting in motion, by the sensible through the sense organs, a part of the soul that Epicurus considered alogon and Lucretius called anima. This part, which is widely distributed throughout the body, is clearly separated from the mind, located in the chest, where thought and judgment take place. This means that sensation is only the product of the temporary action of reality on the subject who passively receives it. The sensations are not subjected at the perceptual level, that is, at the level of the a-rational soul, to any operation of comparison, synthesis or judgment.

To return to Molyneux’s problem, these aspects of Epicurean epistemological theory exclude the idea that the mere visual perception of the sphere evokes its previous tactile perception. For this to be possible, the sensation should draw on a perceptual (intersensory) memory that, as we have seen, Epicurus does not admit at the level of the sensation alone. So recognition is not possible at the level of sensations. If the sensation is not enough, what would be enough for the “intermodal” recognition of the shape of the sphere and the cube to take place? Probably, according to an Epicurean, the anticipation or the prolepsis. What is this about?

Preconception, they [the Epicureans] say, is as it were a perception, or correct opinion, or conception, or universal “stored notion” (i.e. memory) of that which has frequently become evident externally: e.g. “Such and such a kind of thing is a man”. For as soon as the word “man” is uttered, immediately its delineation also comes to mind by means of preconception, since the senses give the lead. Thus, what primarily underlies each name
is something self-evident. And what we inquire about we would not have inquired about if we had not had prior knowledge of it. For example: “Is what’s standing over there a horse or a cow?”. For one must at some time have come to know the form of a horse and that of a cow by means of preconception, nor would we have named something if we had not previously learnt its delineation by means of preconception.


Anticipation, or prolepsis, is, after sensation, the second most important cognitive criterion according to the Epicureans. If the feeling is endowed with what Pierre-Marie Morel calls “principe d’actualité,” or a validity that is contemporary to the action of the sensible object on the sensory organ, the anticipation is a “prolongation” and takes place when this object is no longer present. It is, therefore, a notion built on the basis of the repeated perception of a body. Using the example of Molyneux, it would be the multisensory perception of a sphere or a cube that allows a person to put together the perceptual material provided by the different senses and to form an idea, a “composite” concept of a “cube” or of a “sphere”. The formation of this composite idea or concept allows not only the “possession” of the notion of a universal object (formed by the reiteration of the perception of many particular examples) in the absence of the corresponding object, but also its recognition once present. In other words, if sensations are the way to the knowledge of an object, anticipations allow its acknowledgment.

Returning to Epicurus’ hypothetical response to Molyneux, I think that the intermodal recognition of a shape could only take place under one condition: that a general notion has previously been constituted in which all the qualities of the object are synthesized. In the case of the Molyneux problem, the person born blind has a general notion of the sphere and the cube, but in this notion, the qualities provided by sight are not synthesized. This means that once sight has been acquired, the person observing the sphere and the cube without being able to touch them will not be able to appeal to the general concept of the cube or sphere that they possess to implement the recognition.

It is interesting to note that both in the case of Locke and Molyneux, and in the case of Epicurus, the answer to the question is negative and, despite some theoretical differences, for the same reason. In fact, according to our philosophers, for intermodal recognition to be possible, it would be necessary for the person born blind to have already experienced their visual and tactile sensations simultaneously. In other words, the individual would need to have learnt the perception of form (perceptual learning) by passing through the different senses. In the case of Locke and Molyneux, this step, as we have seen, is necessary for the subject to get used to moving from the perception of two-dimensional visual forms to the perception of three-dimensional tactile forms. Learning of this correspondence between the perceived qualities, possible thanks to the reiteration of the tactile and visual experience of the sphere and the cube, is the necessary condition for intermodal recognition to take place. As Molyneux explains well, the person must understand that what is visually perceived as a corner, from a tactile point of view produces a sensation of angularity and that a form of correspondence is created between these two sensations. In the case of Epicurus, recognition is not possible at the level of sensations. In fact, because the sensations are a-rational and without memory they have an immediate validity and cannot compare to, evoke or correct each other. The visual sensation cannot, therefore, recall a previous tactile sensation. For this to be possible, it is necessary to appeal to the anticipations that preserve the perceptive material and that, through the comparison and synthesis of this material, allow the formation of a general and composite notion. Even for Epicurus, a composite notion formed by habit, i.e. the reiteration of the intermodal perception of the sphere and the cube, is necessary. Despite the theoretical differences between
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the two systems, on the matter of common sensibles and three-dimensionality, the answer is the same: the person born blind who has subsequently acquired sight will not be able to immediately recognize the sphere and the cube.

The different Epicurean texts that I analyze in this study and which allowed me to provide an Epicurean answer to the Molyneux problem are proof of the fact that, beyond the differences between two distant versions of empiricism, due to the different systems and contexts to which they belong and to the different objectives they pursue, the problem of the limits and potentialities of experience alone remains common. On the one hand, there are the limits of visual experience: the perception of form without depth, in Locke’s conception, and the limits of perception that we could define as “temporal”, because it is valid only and exclusively *hie et nunc*, in the Epicurean doctrine. On the other hand, we cannot deny the potential of experience and, in particular, of repeated (habitual) experience, which in both systems provides the perceptual material for the constitution of more complex knowledge. The Molyneux problem finds the right perspective to challenge Lockean empiricism on this central issue. The proof of this is its success at the time. However, the analysis of this problem in the light of Epicurean epistemology has demonstrated the relevance of this type of problem even in a context as distant philosophically and historically as the Ancient one. This shows how these kinds of questions constitute the heart of empiricism itself, both Lockean and Epicurean.

Notes

3 DA II, 6.
4 This interpretation could be explained in the light of some studies such as that of Brochard 1912 on “Descartes Stoïcien”. According to the scholar, some Cartesian theories, including those of innate ideas, derive from a Stoic influence on the French philosopher. McRae seems to accept the interpretative proposal, citing Cicero and the Stoics among the fathers of innatism, although he would like to point out that in his opinion Locke’s critical objective was Lord Herbert of Cherbury and not Descartes (McRae 1972: 31). The attribution of the theory of innate ideas to Stoicism is a very controversial issue. On the one hand, this attribution may seem paradoxical since the theory of *tabula rasa* belongs to the Stoic milieu (Act. IV, 11, 1–4). On the other hand, because of the few sources, specialists do not yet agree on the presence or absence of a certain form of innatism in stoicism, i.e. dispositional innatism. To examine the question in depth, see Sandbach 1971, Scott 1988 et Dyson 2009.
7 I analyze this version and not the first one, although it is more detailed, since this second one was published by Locke followed by his answer.
8 The term “idea” is used by Locke himself to indicate the matter of the intellect. Simple ideas are those that come directly and passively from the senses. Complex ideas are those elaborated from the perceptual material of the intellect. For more information on this issue see Chappell 1994.
9 See also Locke 1975: II, ch.V.
12 *Simulacrum* is the Latin term used by Lucretius to translate the Epicurean term *eidolon*.
14 See also DRN IV vv. 34–466.
16 DRN IV vv. 365–641.
17 Unfortunately, we lost the writings in which Epicurus dealt with the fourth nature. Although the theory appears only in Lucretius, as well as in some later testimonies, it is more than likely that the authorship is to be attributed to the master of the Garden, as does Aetius (Act. 4.3.11 = Us. 315).
18 For an in-depth study of Epicurean psychology see Kerferd 1971, Konstan 2008a, Verde 2015.
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19 In fact, if it were, any body equipped with these elements would be sentient. For Epicurus, this is a way of safeguarding the difference between living and non-living beings (i.e. sentient and non-sentient), as witnessed by experience, while remaining consistent with his materialistic psychology.

20 In the case of sight, the eyes, in the case of smell, the nose, in the case of hearing, the ears, in the case of taste, the tongue, and the palate and in the case of touch, the region of the body concerned. This is an important aspect of the Epicurean theory according to which the soul does not perceive through the body but together with the body (DRN III vv. 359–369).

21 Errors do not belong to the senses but to judgment. According to Epicurus, saying that a sensation is true means that the sensation is real (Sextus Empiricus, MVII = Us. 244 9) and could not be otherwise since it is the action (direct or remote) of bodies on the subject.

22 This is the main difference between the Epicurean theory of eidola and the Democritean theory of eidola (Theophr. Sens. §50) See Baldes 1975, Bukert 1977, Rudolph 2011.

23 Hrdt §53.

24 For an interpretation of Epicurus as an exponent of direct realism see; Ehli 2017.

25 These verses aim to demonstrate the validity of the theory of the simulacra of sight and not to question, as Molyneux does with his question, the relationship between the senses.

26 In this sense, Epicurus appears to anticipate Berkeley’s theories (Berkeley 1732: § 109). As Mackie rightly underscores:

On Berkeley’s view there is, at least primitively, no one common sensible shape […] the name of any particular shape, say ‘square’, stands for a pair of correlated ideas, one visual and one tactual, and what Aristotle takes as the perceiving of some one object through two senses is really the separate perceiving, by each of the two senses, of an idea special to that sense, accompanied by an inference to or expectation of the correlated idea which is peculiar to the other sense.

Mackie 1976: 30


30 Asmis 1984 and Morel 2015.

31 Where “depth” indicates here the unfilled (three-dimensional) space of the eidolon body.


33 Since, according to Epicurus, there are no common sensibles, knowledge is sensory-specific: each sense accounts for a specific aspect of reality. As we have seen, this aspect recalls Berkeley’s theories. The difference between Epicurus and Berkeley lies in the fact that, according to the latter, no material reality exists: the essence of a being resides in being perceived. Therefore, according to Berkeley, not only the cognitive access to reality is sensory specific, but reality itself (Berkeley 1734: §9).

34 DRN IV vv. 479–486.


36 Hrdt. §66.

37 DRN III vv. 136–142.


40 Morel 2009: 141.

41 This “general concept” must be distinguished from the common sensible. The general concept is produced by the sum of the specific data each sensory organ provides about the object. Accordingly, it is not a single datum shared by several senses.

42 Where “immediately” refers in both cases to the need for a previous multisensory experience of the object.

References


Epicureanism and Molyneux’s question


Giulia Scalas


