

# General Principles of Epicurean Canonics

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## 1. Introduction To Epicurean Canonics

This page is in the beginning stages of drafting. In the meantime, many of the main Epicurean citations relevant to canonics are [collected here](#).

Epicurean Canonics forms the foundational part of Epicurean philosophy, serving as the basis for understanding nature and guiding ethical practice. This canon is divided into three primary components: Sensations, Anticipations, and Feelings, which collectively help in discerning truth and guiding practical life.

### 1.1. Knowledge and Truth

(to be updated)

### 1.2. The Question of Definitions - Epicurean Response To the Logicians' "Heap / Sorites" Question

DeWitt's Commentary On The Sorites Question

### 1.3. All Sensations Are True - Error Is In Opinion Rather Than The Senses

Epicurus held that truth is grounded in the sensations, and that we must accept that [all sensations are true](#) - not "true" in the literal sense that every glimpse of light gives us complete knowledge of the world, but true in the sense of honestly reported without injection of opinion. Epicurus held that errors occur in the mind, in putting together and reaching conclusions about what the sensations are telling us, not in the sensations

themselves, which report basic data but do not tell us what that data means.

#### **1.4. Illusions Do Not Invalidate The Senses**

to be updated...

#### **1.5. Sensations**

Sensations are the primary means by which Epicureans determine the truth of physical reality. Knowledge relies on sensory perception, and our senses are reliable and ultimately the only indicators of the physical world around us. Sensations are immediate and undeniable; they provide a direct encounter with reality that cannot be disputed. This stance contrasts with the skepticism of other philosophical schools that doubted the reliability of sensory information.

Epicurus emphasized that errors arise not from the sensations themselves but from the judgments we make about them. For instance, seeing a bent stick in water is not a false sensation, but an accurate perception of light refraction. The error lies in the judgment that the stick itself is bent. Therefore, proper interpretation of sensory data is crucial for accurate knowledge.

#### **1.6. Anticipations / Prolepsis**

Anticipations, or "preconceptions," or "prolepsis," refer to the intuitive processes which influence the formation of ideas and concepts. These are fundamental notions that arise spontaneously without the need for direct teaching. Epicurus held that anticipations are pre-logical forms of understanding, and that they provide a basic framework for identifying and categorizing sensory experiences.

For example, the concept of "justice" is not learned through experience alone, but arises through operation of an inherent faculty that leads ultimately to the recognition (laer, and in the mind) to just and unjust actions. This intrinsic faculty aids in making ethical decisions and understanding social constructs without requiring continuous and exhaustive empirical validation.

#### **1.7. Feelings**

"Feelings," a reference to pleasure and pain, serve as the ultimate guides for ethical living in Epicurean philosophy. Epicurus posited that all human actions should be evaluated as to whether they achieve pleasure and avoid pain. In this view, Pleasure is seen as the highest good and the natural end (telos) of life, while pain is the ultimate evil.

This framework does not lead to indulgence in momentary pleasures, but to achieving an overall state of pleasure as evaluated in terms of all experiences which are not painful.

#### **1.8. Images**

to be updated ....

#### **1.9. The Role of Reason**

As distinguished from Dialectical Logic, "Reason" plays an important role in Epicurean Canonics, primarily in interpreting sensations, refining anticipations, and managing feelings. Epicurus advocated "sober calculation" in the choice of pleasures and pains to achieve the greatest overall happiness. This practical reason involves a calculus of advantage, weighing the potential pleasures and pains of any action to make the best possible choice.

Epicurus pointed out that some desires are natural and necessary, such as those for food and shelter, while others are natural but not necessary, like the desire for luxury. There are also desires that are neither natural nor necessary, such as the desire for fame. Understanding these distinctions helps individuals pursue only

those pleasures that lead to the greatest pleasure and the avoidance of unnecessary pains .

### **1.10. Critique of Dialectic and Rhetoric**

Epicurus was critical of abstract logic and the dialectic method, particularly as practiced by Socrates and Plato, viewing them as unproductive and often misleading. He believed that the irony and sophistry involved in dialectical debates distracted from the pursuit of true knowledge and happiness. Instead, he advocated for clear and straightforward communication, valuing honesty and directness over rhetorical skill. This stance also extended to a broader critique of the political obsession found in other philosophical traditions, which he saw as a source of unnecessary anxiety and conflict .

### **1.11. The Issue Of Continuous Pleasure**

One of the significant doctrines in Epicurean Canonics is the idea that continuous pleasure is possible. Epicurus argued that once every aspect of experience is pleasurable, any pursuit of additional of pleasure does not increase happiness. From this perspective, the replacement of all pain with pleasure, rather than the pursuit of continuous new pleasures, constitutes the limit of the magnitude of pleasure.

### **1.12. The Dualistic Good**

Epicurus focused on the dualistic good of both body and soul. Health of the body and soul are seen as interdependent and equally important. This psychosomatic approach underscores the parity between physical and mental well-being, rejecting the notion of the soul's superiority over the body. By maintaining both physical health and mental health, one can achieve the most complete happiness .

### **1.13. He Who Says "Nothing Can Be Known" Knows Nothing. Knowledge Is Possible And It Is Error To Be A Radical Skeptic**

Epicurus was a strong opponent of skepticism in philosophy, and he opposed both radical skeptics like Pyrrho and those like Plato who focused on arguing that the senses are not reliable sources of knowledge. Epicurus held that Knowledge is possible, and that through knowledge we can learn how to attain happiness.

### **1.14. The Priority Of Nature Over "Logic" And Rejection of Dialectic**

Epicurus taught that we should defer to the Priority Of Nature Over "Logic," and that we should reject "Dialectic" as a source of knowledge. He taught the importance of Practical Deductive Reasoning, of Clarity, and of "Waiting" before making a decision where multiple possibilities that are consistent with observation support different conclusions.

### **1.15. Practical Deductive Reasoning**

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### **1.16. The Importance of Clarity**

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### **1.17. "Waiting" And The Status Of Multiple Possibilities**

Epicurus held that in some cases we cannot obtain certainty and the elimination of all but one possibilities, so we must at times allow that Multiple Possibilities may be true. The selection of one possibility among many, when many are equally supported by the evidence, is therefore seen as arbitrary and capricious.