

# General Principles of Epicurean Canonics

## Table Of Contents

- [1. Introduction To Epicurean Canonics](#)
  - [1.1. Sensations](#)
  - [1.2. Anticipations / Prolepsis](#)
  - [1.3. Feelings](#)
- [2. General Significance of the Canon](#)
- [3. We Must First Have Confidence In Our Ability to Judge That Which is Right In Front of Us Before We Can Speculate About Things That Are More Remote](#)
  - [3.1. Letter to Herodotus](#)
  - [3.2. Lucretius Book One](#)
- [4. The Flux And Our Ability To Comprehend It](#)
- [5. Knowledge, Truth, and Reality](#)
- [6. The Question of Definitions - Epicurean Response To the Logicians' "Heap / Sorites" Question](#)
- [7. Critique of Dialectic and Rhetoric](#)
- [8. Reason Is Dependent On The Senses](#)
  - [8.1. Error Is Added By The Mind, Not By The Senses](#)
  - [8.2. Anyone Who Argues Nothing Can Be Known Admits That He Knows Nothing](#)
  - [8.3. Reason Derives Its Authority From The Senses](#)
  - [8.4. Life Itself Depends On Trusting The Senses](#)
  - [8.5. If The Senses Are False Then All Reasoning Sprung From Them Is False](#)
- [9. Reasoning By Analogy From That Which Is Known To That Which Is Unknown](#)
  - [9.1. Epicurus' Letter to Pythocles](#)
  - [9.2. Epicurus' On Nature XI](#)
- [10. The Correct Role of Reason](#)
- [11. He Who Says "Nothing Can Be Known" Knows Nothing. Knowledge Is Possible And It Is Error To Be A Radical Skeptic](#)
- [12. All Sensations Are "True" - Error Is In The Mind Not The Senses](#)
- [13. The Nature of Images](#)
  - [13.1. Discussion of Images In Letter to Herodotus](#)
  - [13.2. Discussion Of Images In Lucretius](#)
- [14. Qualities \(Events or Accidents\) and Properties](#)
  - [14.1. The Nature of Properties \(Attributes Which Have An Eternal Existence And Do Not Change Over Time\)](#)
  - [14.2. The Nature of Qualities, Such As The The Trojan War, Which Do Not Have Eternal Existence And Do Change Over Time \(Also Referred To As Events or Accidents\)](#)
  - [14.3. Color As An Example of An Event / Accident / Quality](#)
- [15. The Importance of Clarity](#)
- [16. The Use of Outlines](#)
- [17. "Waiting" And The Status Of Multiple Possibilities](#)
- [18. Principal Doctrines Relevant to Canonics](#)
- [19. Vatican Sayings Relevant to Canonics](#)
- [20. Diogenes Laertius Section on Canonics](#)

## 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. 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.

### 1.2. 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.

### 1.3. 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.

## 2. General Significance of the Canon

1. **Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Philosophers*, X.31:** In *The Canon* Epicurus states that the sensations, the prolepses, and the passions are the criteria of truth.
2. **Cicero, *On End-Goals, Good and Bad*, I.19.63 (Torquatus to Cicero):** Besides, it is only by firmly grasping a well-established scientific system, observing the *standard* or *Canon* that has fallen as it were from heaven, so that all men may know it – only by making that Canon the test of all our judgments, that we can hope always to stand fast in our belief, unshaken by the eloquence of any man.
3. **Cicero, *On Ends*, Book 1. [63]** It was indeed excellently said by Epicurus that fortune only in a small degree crosses the wise man's path, and that his greatest and most important undertakings are executed in accordance with his own design and his own principles, and that no greater pleasure can be reaped from a life which is without end in time, than is reaped from this which we know to have its allotted end. He judged that the logic of your school possesses no efficacy either for the amelioration of life or for the facilitation of debate. He laid the greatest stress on natural science. That branch of knowledge enables us to realize clearly the force of words and the natural conditions of speech and

the theory of consistent and contradictory expressions; and when we have learned the constitution of the universe we are relieved of superstition, are emancipated from the dread of death, are not agitated through ignorance of phenomena, from which ignorance, more than any thing else, terrible panics often arise; finally, our characters will also be improved when we have learned what it is that nature craves. Then again if we grasp a firm knowledge of phenomena, and uphold that canon, which almost fell from heaven into human ken, that test to which we are to bring all our judgments concerning things, we shall never succumb to any man's eloquence and abandon our opinions.

4. [64] Moreover, unless the constitution of the world is thoroughly understood, we shall by no means be able to justify the verdicts of our senses. Further, our mental perceptions all arise from our sensations; and if these are all to be true, as the system of Epicurus proves to us, then only will cognition and perception become possible. Now those who invalidate sensations and say that perception is altogether impossible, cannot even clear the way for this very argument of theirs when they have thrust the senses aside. Moreover, when cognition and knowledge have been invalidated, every principle concerning the conduct of life and the performance of its business becomes invalidated. So from natural science we borrow courage to withstand the fear of death, and firmness to face superstitious dread, and tranquility of mind, through the removal of ignorance concerning the mysteries of the world, and self-control, arising from the elucidation of the nature of the passions and their different classes, and as I shewed just now, our leader again has established the canon and criterion of knowledge and thus has imparted to us a method for marking off falsehood from truth.

### **3. We Must First Have Confidence In Our Ability to Judge That Which is Right In Front of Us Before We Can Speculate About Things That Are More Remote**

#### **3.1. Letter to Herodotus**

[38] For this purpose it is essential that the first mental image associated with each word should be regarded, and that there should be no need of explanation, if we are really to have a standard to which to refer a problem of investigation or reflection or a mental inference. **And besides we must keep all our investigations in accord with our sensations, and in particular with the immediate apprehensions whether of the mind or of any one of the instruments of judgment, and likewise in accord with the feelings existing in us, in order that we may have indications whereby we may judge both the problem of sense perception and the unseen.** ... Moreover, the universe is bodies and space: **for that bodies exist, sense itself witnesses in the experience of all men, and in accordance with the evidence of sense we must of necessity judge of the imperceptible by reasoning, as I have already said.**

#### **3.2. Lucretius Book One**

[418] **For that body exists is declared by the feeling which all share alike; and unless faith in this feeling be firmly grounded at once and prevail, there will be naught to which we can make appeal about things hidden, so as to prove aught by the reasoning of the mind.**

### **4. The Flux And Our Ability To Comprehend It**

Diogenes of Oinoanda On The Flux

[Link to Text](#)

1. Fr. 5: [Others do not] explicitly [stigmatise] natural science as unnecessary, being ashamed to acknowledge [this], but use another means of discarding it. For, when they assert that things are inapprehensible, what else are they saying than that there is no need for us to pursue natural science? After all, who will choose to seek what he can never find?
2. Now Aristotle and those who hold the same Peripatetic views as Aristotle say that nothing is scientifically knowable, because things are continually in flux and, on account of the rapidity of the flux,

evade our apprehension. We on the other hand acknowledge their flux, but not its being so rapid that the nature of each thing [is] at no time apprehensible by sense-perception. And indeed [in no way would the upholders of] the view under discussion have been able to say (and this is just what they do [maintain] that [at one time] this is [white] and this black, while [at another time] neither this is [white nor] that black, [if] they had not had [previous] knowledge of the nature of both white and black.

## 5. Knowledge, Truth, and Reality

1. Diogenes Laertius [31] Logic they reject as misleading. For they say it is sufficient for physicists to be guided by what things say of themselves. Thus in *The Canon* Epicurus says that the tests of truth are the sensations and concepts and the feelings; the Epicureans add to these the intuitive apprehensions of the mind. And this he says himself too in the summary addressed to Herodotus and in the [Principal Doctrines](#). For, he says, all sensation is irrational and does not admit of memory; for it is not set in motion by itself, nor when it is set in motion by something else, can it add to it or take from it. [32] Nor is there anything which can refute the sensations. For a similar sensation cannot refute a similar because it is equivalent in validity, nor a dissimilar a dissimilar, for the objects of which they are the criteria are not the same; nor again can reason, for all reason is dependent upon sensations; nor can one sensation refute another, for we attend to them all alike. Again, the fact of apperception confirms the truth of the sensations. And seeing and hearing are as much facts as feeling pain. From this it follows that as regards the imperceptible we must draw inferences from phenomena. For all thoughts have their origin in sensations by means of coincidence and analogy and similarity and combination, reasoning too contributing something. And the visions of the insane and those in dreams are true, for they cause movement, and that which does not exist cannot cause movement.
2. U244 **Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians II (Against the Dogmatists, II).9***: Epicurus said that all sensibles were true and real. For there is no difference between saying that something is true and that it is real. And that is why, in giving a formalization of the true and the false, he says, “that which is such as it is said to be, is true” and “that which is not such as it is said to be, is false.”
3. ***Letter to Herodotus [51]***: For the similarity between the things which exist, which we call real, and the images received as a likeness of things and produced either in sleep or through some other acts of apprehension on the part of the mind or the other instruments of judgment, could never be, unless there were some effluences of this nature actually brought into contact with our senses. And error would not exist unless another kind of movement too were produced inside ourselves, closely linked to the apprehension of images, but differing from it; and it is owing to this, supposing it is not confirmed, or is contradicted, that falsehood arises; but if it is confirmed or not contradicted, it is true.
4. Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, I.7.22: Turn next to the second division of philosophy, the department of Method and of Dialectic, which its termed Logik?. Of the whole armor of Logic your founder, as it seems to me, is absolutely destitute. He does away with Definition; he has no doctrine of Division or Partition; he gives no rules for Deduction or Syllogistic Inference, and imparts no method for resolving Dilemmas or for detecting Fallacies of Equivocation. The Criteria of reality he places in sensation; once let the senses accept as true something that is false, and every possible criterion of truth and falsehood seems to him to be immediately destroyed. {lacuna} He lays the very greatest stress upon that which, as he declares, Nature herself decrees and sanctions, that is: the feelings of pleasure and pain. These he maintains lie at the root of every act of choice and of avoidance.
5. U247 Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians, I (Against the Dogmatists, I) 203*: Epicurus says that there are two things which are linked to each other, presentation and opinion, and that of these presentation (which he also calls 'clear fact') is always true. For just as the primary feelings, i.e., pleasure and pain, come to be from certain productive factors and in accordance with productive factors themselves (for example, pleasure comes to be from pleasant things and pain from painful things, and what causes pleasure can never fail to be pleasant, nor can what produces pain not be painful; but rather, it is necessary that what gives pleasure should be pleasant and that what gives pain should, in its nature, be painful), likewise, in the case of presentations, which are feelings within us, what causes each of them is presented in every respect and unqualifiedly, and since it is

presented it cannot help but exist in truth just as it is presented [...lacuna...] that it is productive of presentation. And one must reason similarly for the individual senses. For what is visible not only is presented as visible but also is such as it is presented; and what is audible is not only presented as audible, but also is like that in truth; and similarly for the rest. Therefore, it turns out that all presentations are true. And reasonably so. For if, the Epicureans say, a presentation is true if it comes from an existing object and in accordance with the existing object, and if every presentation arises from the object presented and in accordance with the presented object itself, then necessarily every presentation is true.

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

The "sorites" method of argument is discussed in [Cicero's Academic Questions Section XVI](#):

Quote

Now on all these empty perceptions Antiochus brought forward a great many arguments, and one whole day was occupied in the discussion of this subject. But I do not [pg 046] think that I ought to adopt the same course, but merely to give the heads of what he said.

And in the first place, they are blameable in this, that they use a most captious kind of interrogation. And the system of adding or taking away, step by step, minute items from a proposition, is a kind of argument very little to be approved of in philosophy. They call it sorites,<sup>11</sup> when they make up a heap by adding grain after grain; a very vicious and captious style of arguing. For you mount up in this way:—If a vision is brought by God before a man asleep of such a nature as to be probable (probabile), why may not one also be brought of such a nature as to be very like truth (verisimile)? If so, then why may not one be brought which can hardly be distinguished from truth? If so, then why may there not be one which cannot be distinguished at all? If so, then why may there not be such that there is actually no difference between them?—If you come to this point because I have granted you all the previous propositions, it will be my fault; but if you advance thither of your own accord, it will be yours. For who will grant to you either that God can do everything, or that even if He could He would act in that manner? And how do you assume that if one thing may be like another, it follows that it may also be difficult to distinguish between them? And then, that one cannot distinguish between them at all? And lastly, that they are identical? So that if wolves are like dogs, you will come at last to asserting that they are the same animals. And indeed there are some things not honourable, which are like things that are honourable; some things not good, like those that are good; some things proceeding on no system, like others which are regulated by system. Why then do we hesitate to affirm that there is no difference between all these things? Do we not even see that they are inconsistent? For there is nothing that can be transferred from its own genus to another. But if such a conclusion did follow, as that there was no difference between perceptions of different genera, but that some could be found which were both in their own genus and in one which did not belong to them, how could that be possible?

[Discussion here.](#)

DeWitt's Commentary On The Sorites Question

## 7. 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. Epicurus taught that we should prioritize the study of Nature over "logic," and 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.

## **8. Reason Is Dependent On The Senses**

[Link to text](#)

### **8.1. Error Is Added By The Mind, Not By The Senses**

1. Lucretius Book 4 - [462] Wondrously many other things of this sort we see, all of which would fain spoil our trust in the senses; all in vain, since the greatest part of these things deceives us on account of the opinions of the mind, which we add ourselves, so that things not seen by the senses are counted as seen. For nothing is harder than to distinguish things manifest from things uncertain, which the mind straightway adds of itself.

### **8.2. Anyone Who Argues Nothing Can Be Known Admits That He Knows Nothing**

1. Lucretius Book 4 - [469] Again, if any one thinks that nothing is known, he knows not whether that can be known either, since he admits that he knows nothing. Against him then I will refrain from joining issue, who plants himself with his head in the place of his feet. And yet were I to grant that he knows this too, yet I would ask this one question; since he has never before seen any truth in things, whence does he know what is knowing, and not knowing each in turn, what thing has begotten the concept of the true and the false, what thing has proved that the doubtful differs from the certain?

### **8.3. Reason Derives Its Authority From The Senses**

1. Lucretius Book 4 - [478] You will find that the concept of the true is begotten first from the senses, and that the senses cannot be gainsaid. For something must be found with a greater surety, which can of its own authority refute the false by the true. Next then, what must be held to be of greater surety than sense? Will reason, sprung from false sensation, avail to speak against the senses, when it is wholly sprung from the senses? For unless they are true, all reason too becomes false. Or will the ears be able to pass judgement on the eyes, or touch on the ears? or again will the taste in the mouth refute this touch; will the nostrils disprove it, or the eyes show it false? It is not so, I trow. For each sense has its faculty set apart, each its own power, and so it must needs be that we perceive in one way what is soft or cold or hot, and in another the diverse colours of things, and see all that goes along with colour. Likewise, the taste of the mouth has its power apart; in one way smells arise, in another sounds. And so it must needs be that one sense cannot prove another false. Nor again will they be able to pass judgement on themselves, since equal trust must at all times be placed in them. Therefore, whatever they have perceived on each occasion, is true.

### **8.4. Life Itself Depends On Trusting The Senses**

1. Lucretius Book 4 - [500] And if reason is unable to unravel the cause, why those things which close at hand were square, are seen round from a distance, still it is better through lack of reasoning to be at fault in accounting for the causes of either shape, rather than to let things clear seen slip abroad from your grasp, and to assail the grounds of belief, and to pluck up the whole foundations on which life and existence rest. For not only would all reasoning fall away; life itself too would collapse straightway, unless you chose to trust the senses, and avoid headlong spots and all other things of this kind which must be shunned, and to make for what is opposite to these. Know, then, that all this is but an empty store of words, which has been drawn up and arrayed against the senses.

## 8.5. If The Senses Are False Then All Reasoning Sprung From Them Is False

1. Lucretius Book 1 - [418] But now, to weave again at the web, which is the task of my discourse, all nature then, as it is of itself, is built of these two things: for there are bodies and the void, in which they are placed and where they move hither and thither. For that body exists is declared by the feeling which all share alike; and unless faith in this feeling be firmly grounded at once and prevail, there will be naught to which we can make appeal about things hidden, so as to prove aught by the reasoning of the mind. And next, were there not room and empty space, which we call void, nowhere could bodies be placed, nor could they wander at all hither and thither in any direction; and this I have above shown to you but a little while before.
2. Lucretius Book 4 - [513] Again, just as in a building, if the first ruler is awry, and if the square is wrong and out of the straight lines, if the level sags a whit in any place, it must needs be that the whole structure will be made faulty and crooked, all awry, bulging, leaning forwards or backwards, and out of harmony, so that some parts seem already to long to fall, or do fall, all betrayed by the first wrong measurements; even so then your reasoning of things must be awry and false, which all springs from false senses.

## 9. Reasoning By Analogy From That Which Is Known To That Which Is Unknown

### 9.1. Epicurus' Letter to Pythocles

The wanings of the moon and its subsequent waxings ..... may be explained in all the ways in which phenomena on earth invite us to such explanations of these phases, if only one does not fall in love with the method of a single explanation (?????? ???? ) and groundlessly disapproves of others, without having considered what it is possible for a human being to observe and what it is not and, for this reason, desirous of observing things that cannot be observed'.

### 9.2. Epicurus' On Nature XI

[Line Ia11-19; Sedley] The sun, if we walk towards the place from which it appeared to us] to rise, directing ourselves up into the mainland zone, appears to us to set where we previously passed by, sometimes even when we have moved in all only a short distance. And this time we cannot blame it on the latitudinal movements. Why after all should you declare the measurement from here, or the one from here, or the one from here, or this one a more reliable guide of the risings and settings (of the sun)?

[Line IIa1 - 21; Sedley] They cannot hope] to form a [mental] model ([?]?????) and to reason out (????????????) anything about these matters. For it seems to me that when they spend their time contriving some of them (I means their [?]????, instruments) and fooling around with others, it is no wonder, in view not only of the enslavements brought upon them by their doctrines but also (as far as concerns the appearances of the sun) of the indeterminacies (????????) of risings and settings, that they cannot form an adequate mental model by means of their instruments which produce no regularity. But their instruments are ...

## 10. The Correct 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 .

## **11. 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.

## **12. All Sensations Are "True" - Error Is In The Mind Not 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. Epicurus to Herodotus 38 - [We] must keep all our investigations in accord with our sensations, and in particular with the immediate apprehensions whether of the mind or of any one of the instruments of judgment, and likewise in accord with the feelings existing in us, in order that we may have indications whereby we may judge both the problem of sense perception and the unseen. ... Moreover, the universe is bodies and space: for that bodies exist, sense itself witnesses in the experience of all men, and in accordance with the evidence of sense we must of necessity judge of the imperceptible by reasoning, as I have already said.
2. Lucretius 1:418 - For that body exists is declared by the feeling which all share alike; and unless faith in this feeling be firmly grounded at once and prevail, there will be naught to which we can make appeal about things hidden, so as to prove aught by the reasoning of the mind.
3. Lucretius 4:478 - You will find that the concept of the true is begotten first from the senses, and that the senses cannot be gainsaid. For something must be found with a greater surety, which can of its own authority refute the false by the true. Next then, what must be held to be of greater surety than sense? Will reason, sprung from false sensation, avail to speak against the senses, when it is wholly sprung from the senses? For unless they are true, all reason too becomes false.
4. Torquatus speaking for Epicurus in On Ends 1:64 - Moreover, unless the constitution of the world is thoroughly understood, we shall by no means be able to justify the verdicts of our senses. Further, our mental perceptions all arise from our sensations; and if these are all to be true, as the system of Epicurus proves to us, then only will cognition and perception become possible. Now those who invalidate sensations and say that perception is altogether impossible, cannot even clear the way for this very argument of theirs when they have thrust the senses aside. Moreover, when cognition and knowledge have been invalidated, every principle concerning the conduct of life and the performance of its business becomes invalidated.
5. Epicurus to Herodotus 51 - (Yonge) "And, on the other side, error could not be possible, if we did not receive some other motion also, a sort of initiative of intelligence connected, it is true, with direct representation, but going beyond that representative. These conceptions being connected with direct perception which produces the representation, but going beyond it."
6. Epicurus On Nature Book 28, Sedley trans, fr. 13, col. 6 inf. - "I also frequently reflected that if, when I raised difficulties which someone might have turned against us, he should claim that what used to be assimilated from ordinary language was the same as used to be practiced in the written work, many might well conclude that in those days false opinion was represented in that language, whether through an empirical process, an image-based process, or a theoretical process, or through a non-empirical process, not following one of our current divisions, but simply arising from an internal movement; but that now, because the means of expression is adapted to additional ends, discrimination provides a lead towards the truth. However, let no one ever try to get even with you by



- linking with you any trace of this suspicion; but [turn] to the entire faculty of empirical reasoning...
7. (Aetius 4.8.10) "Leucippus, Democritus, and Epicurus say that sensation and thought arise in the soul from images that approach from outside, for neither of these can occur to anyone without the image falling upon him."
  8. (Aetius 4.9.5 - 6) "Epicurus says that every sensation and every impression is true, but of the opinions some are true and some false; and sensation gives us a false picture in one respect only, namely with regard to objects of thought; but the impression does so in two respects, for there is impression of both sense objects and objects of thought. Parmenides, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Democritus, Epicurus, and Heraclides say that the particular sensations of their own object occur in accordance with the matching sized of the pores, each of the sense objects corresponding to each sense."
  9. Peter Konstans collected a number of citations for this [here](#).

## 13. The Nature of Images

### 13.1. Discussion of Images In Letter to Herotodus

1. [46] Moreover, there are images like in shape to the solid bodies, far surpassing perceptible things in their subtlety of texture. For it is not impossible that such emanations should be formed in that which surrounds the objects, nor that there should be opportunities for the formation of such hollow and thin frames, nor that there should be effluences which preserve the respective position and order which they had before in the solid bodies: these images we call idols.
2. [47] Next, nothing among perceptible things contradicts the belief that the images have unsurpassable fineness of texture. And for this reason they have also unsurpassable speed of motion, since the movement of all their atoms is uniform, and besides nothing or very few things hinder their emission by collisions, whereas a body composed of many or infinite atoms is at once hindered by collisions. [48] Besides this, nothing contradicts the belief that the creation of the idols takes place as quick as thought. For the flow of atoms from the surface of bodies is continuous, yet it cannot be detected by any lessening in the size of the object because of the constant filling up of what is lost. The flow of images preserves for a long time the position and order of the atoms in the solid body, though it is occasionally confused. Moreover, compound idols are quickly formed in the air around, because it is not necessary for their substance to be filled in deep inside: and besides there are certain other methods in which existences of this sort are produced. For not one of these beliefs is contradicted by our sensations, if one looks to see in what way sensation will bring us the clear visions from external objects, and in what way again the corresponding sequences of qualities and movements.
3. [49] Now we must suppose too that it is when something enters us from external objects that we not only see but think of their shapes. For external objects could not make on us an impression of the nature of their own colour and shape by means of the air which lies between us and them, nor again by means of the rays or effluences of any sort which pass from us to them — nearly so well as if models, similar in color and shape, leave the objects and enter according to their respective size either into our sight or into our mind; moving along swiftly, and so by this means reproducing the image of a single continuous thing and preserving the corresponding sequence of qualities and movements from the original object as the result of their uniform contact with us, kept up by the vibration of the atoms deep in the interior of the concrete body.
4. [50] And every image which we obtain by an act of apprehension on the part of the mind or of the sense-organs, whether of shape or of properties, this image is the shape or the properties of the concrete object, and is produced by the constant repetition of the image or the impression it has left. Now falsehood and error always lie in the addition of opinion with regard to what is waiting to be confirmed or not contradicted, and then is not confirmed or is contradicted.
5. [51] For the similarity between the things which exist, which we call real and the images received as a likeness of things and produced either in sleep or through some other acts of apprehension on the part of the mind or the other instruments of judgment, could never be, unless there were some effluences of this nature actually brought into contact with our senses. And error would not exist unless another kind of movement too were produced inside ourselves, closely linked to the apprehension of images, but differing from it; and it is owing to this, supposing it is not confirmed, or is contradicted, that falsehood arises; but if it is confirmed or not contradicted, it is true.

6. [52] Therefore we must do our best to keep this doctrine in mind, in order that on the one hand the standards of judgment dependent on the clear visions may not be undermined, and on the other error may not be as firmly established as truth and so throw all into confusion. Moreover, hearing, too, results when a current is carried off from the object speaking or sounding or making a noise, or causing in any other way a sensation of hearing. Now this current is split up into particles, each like the whole, which at the same time preserve a correspondence of qualities with one another and a unity of character which stretches right back to the object which emitted the sound: this unity it is which in most cases produces comprehension in the recipient, or, if not, merely makes manifest the presence of the external object.
7. [53] For without the transference from the object of some correspondence of qualities, comprehension of this nature could not result. We must not then suppose that the actual air is molded into shape by the voice which is emitted or by other similar sounds — for it will be very far from being so acted upon by it — but that the blow which takes place inside us, when we emit our voice, causes at once a squeezing out of certain particles, which produce a stream of breath, of such a character as to afford us the sensation of hearing. Furthermore, we must suppose that smell too, just like hearing, could never bring about any sensation, unless there were certain particles carried off from the object of suitable size to stir this sense-organ, some of them in a manner disorderly and alien to it, others in a regular manner and akin in nature.
8. [54] Moreover, we must suppose that the atoms do not possess any of the qualities belonging to perceptible things, except shape, weight, and size, and all that necessarily goes with shape. For every quality changes; but the atoms do not change at all, since there must needs be something which remains solid and indissoluble at the dissolution of compounds, which can cause changes; not changes into the nonexistent or from the non-existent, but changes effected by the shifting of position of some particles, and by the addition or departure of others. For this reason it is essential that the bodies which shift their position should be imperishable and should not possess the nature of what changes, but parts and configuration of their own. For thus much must needs remain constant.
9. [55] For even in things perceptible to us which change their shape by the withdrawal of matter it is seen that shape remains to them, whereas the qualities do not remain in the changing object, in the way in which shape is left behind, but are lost from the entire body. Now these particles which are left behind are sufficient to cause the differences in compound bodies, since it is essential that some things should be left behind and not be destroyed into the non-existent. Moreover, we must not either suppose that every size exists among the atoms, in order that the evidence of phenomena may not contradict us, but we must suppose that there are some variations of size. For if this be the case, we can give a better account of what occurs in our feelings and sensations.
10. [56] But the existence of atoms of every size is not required to explain the differences of qualities in things, and at the same time some atoms would be bound to come within our ken and be visible; but this is never seen to be the case, nor is it possible to imagine how an atom could become visible.

## 13.2. Discussion Of Images In Lucretius

1. [Opening of Book IV](#)
2. [Discussion of Images](#)
3. [The Illusions of Mirrors](#)
4. [Brightness and Shadows](#)
5. [The Illusion of Square Towers Appearing Round](#)
6. [The Illusions of Ships](#)
7. [Other Illusions](#)
8. [The Fallacy of Thinking that Nothing Is Knowable](#)

## 14. Qualities (Events or Accidents) and Properties

### 14.1. The Nature of Properties (Attributes Which Have An Eternal Existence And Do Not Change Over Time)

Lucretius Book 1 - [449] For all things that have a name, you will find either properties linked to these two things or you will see them to be their accidents. That is a property which in no case can be sundered or separated without the fatal disunion of the thing, as is weight to rocks, heat to fire, moisture to water, touch to all bodies, intangibility to the void.

Letter to Herodotus - [54] Moreover, we must suppose that the atoms do not possess any of the qualities belonging to perceptible things, except shape, weight, and size, and all that necessarily goes with shape. For every quality changes; but the atoms do not change at all, since there must needs be something which remains solid and indissoluble at the dissolution of compounds, which can cause changes; not changes into the nonexistent or from the non-existent, but changes effected by the shifting of position of some particles, and by the addition or departure of others. For this reason it is essential that the bodies which shift their position should be imperishable and should not possess the nature of what changes, but parts and configuration of their own. For thus much must needs remain constant.

Letter to Herodotus - [55] For even in things perceptible to us which change their shape by the withdrawal of matter it is seen that shape remains to them, whereas the qualities do not remain in the changing object, in the way in which shape is left behind, but are lost from the entire body. Now these particles which are left behind are sufficient to cause the differences in compound bodies, since it is essential that some things should be left behind and not be destroyed into the non-existent.

Letter to Herodotus - [69] Moreover, as regards shape and colour and size and weight and all other things that are predicated of body, as though they were concomitant properties either of all things or of things visible or recognizable through the sensation of these qualities, we must not suppose that they are either independent existences (for it is impossible to imagine that), nor that they absolutely do not exist, nor that they are some other kind of incorporeal existence accompanying body, nor that they are material parts of body: rather we should suppose that the whole body in its totality owes its own permanent existence to all these, yet not in the sense that it is composed of properties brought together to form it (as when, for instance, a larger structure is put together out of the parts which compose it, whether the first units of size or other parts smaller than itself, whatever it is), but only, as I say, that it owes its own permanent existence to all of them. All these properties have their own peculiar means of being perceived and distinguished, provided always that the aggregate body goes along with them and is never wrested from them, but in virtue of its comprehension as an aggregate of qualities acquires the predicate of body.

Letter to Herodotus - [70] Furthermore, there often happen to bodies and yet do not permanently accompany them accidents, of which we must suppose neither that they do not exist at all nor that they have the nature of a whole body, nor that they can be classed among unseen things nor as incorporeal. So that when according to the most general usage we employ this name, we make it clear that accidents have neither the nature of the whole, which we comprehend in its aggregate and call body, nor that of the qualities which permanently accompany it, without which a given body cannot be conceived.

Letter to Herodotus - [71] But as the result of certain acts of apprehension, provided the aggregate body goes along with them, they might each be given this name, but only on occasions when each one of them is seen to occur, since accidents are not permanent accompaniments. And we must not banish this clear vision from the realm of existence, because it does not possess the nature of the whole to which it is joined nor that of the permanent accompaniments, nor must we suppose that such contingencies exist independently (for this is inconceivable both with regard to them and to the permanent properties), but, just as it appears in sensation, we must think of them all as accidents occurring to bodies, and that not as permanent accompaniments, or again as having in themselves a place in the ranks of material existence; rather they are seen to be just what our actual sensation shows their proper character to be.

## **14.2. The Nature of Qualities, Such As The The Trojan War, Which Do Not Have Eternal Existence And Do Change Over Time (Also Referred To As Events or Accidents)**

[Link to Text](#)

1. [449] For all things that have a name, you will find either properties linked to these two things or you will see them to be their accidents. That is a property which in no case can be sundered or separated without the fatal disunion of the thing, as is weight to rocks, heat to fire, moisture to water, touch to all bodies, intangibility to the void. On the other hand, slavery, poverty, riches, liberty, war, concord, and other things by whose coming and going the nature of things abides untouched, these we are used, as is natural, to call accidents. Even so time exists not by itself, but from actual things comes a feeling, what was brought to a close in time past, then what is present now, and further what is going to be hereafter. And it must be avowed that no man feels time by itself apart from the motion or quiet rest of things. [464] Then again, when men say that ‘the rape of Tyndarus’s daughter’, or ‘the vanquishing of the Trojan tribes in war’ are things, beware that they do not perchance constrain us to avow that these things exist in themselves, just because the past ages have carried off beyond recall those races of men, of whom, in truth, these were the accidents. For firstly, we might well say that whatsoever has happened is an accident in one case of the countries, in another even of the regions of space. Or again, if there had been no substance of things nor place and space, in which all things are carried on, never would the flame of love have been fired by the beauty of Tyndaris, nor swelling deep in the Phrygian heart of Alexander have kindled the burning battles of savage war, nor unknown of the Trojans would the timber horse have set Pergama aflame at dead of night, when the sons of the Greeks issued from its womb. So that you may see clearly that all events from first to last do not exist, and are not by themselves like body, nor can they be spoken of in the same way as the being of the void, but rather so that you might justly call them the accidents of body and place, in which they are carried on, one and all.

### 14.3. Color As An Example of An Event / Accident / Quality

Letter to Herodotus - [49] Now we must suppose too that it is when something enters us from external objects that we not only see but think of their shapes. For external objects could not make on us an impression of the nature of their own colour and shape by means of the air which lies between us and them, nor again by means of the rays or effluences of any sort which pass from us to them — nearly so well as if models, similar in color and shape, leave the objects and enter according to their respective size either into our sight or into our mind; moving along swiftly, and so by this means reproducing the image of a single continuous thing and preserving the corresponding sequence of qualities and movements from the original object as the result of their uniform contact with us, kept up by the vibration of the atoms deep in the interior of the concrete body.

U30 **Plutarch, *Against Colotes*, 7, p. 1110C:** It is not hard to see that this reasoning may be applied to every object called or commonly held to be bitter, sweet, cathartic, soporific, or luminous: that none has a self-contained quality or potency or is more active than passive on entering the body, but acquires different properties as it blends with different bodies. Accordingly, Epicurus himself in the second book *Against Theophrastus*, when he says that colors are not intrinsic to bodies but a result of certain arrangements and positions relative to the eye, is asserting by this reasoning that body is no more colorless than colored. Earlier in the work, he writes word for word as follows: “{= [U29](#)}, True, it often happens that when objects are enveloped in air of the same degree of darkness, some people perceive a distinction of color while others whose eyesight is weak do not; again, on first entering a dark room we see no color, but do after waiting a short time.” Therefore no body will any more be said to have color than not. If color is relative, white and blue will be relative; and if these, then also sweet and bitter, so that of every quality we can truly say, “It is no more this than it is not this;” for to those affected in a certain way the thing will be this, but not to these not so affected.

## 15. The Importance of Clarity

[Link to Letter to Herodotus](#)

1. [37] Wherefore since the method I have described is valuable to all those who are accustomed to the investigation of nature, I who urge upon others the constant occupation in the investigation of nature, and find my own peace chiefly in a life so occupied, have composed for you another epitome on these

lines, summing up the first principles of the whole doctrine. First of all, Herodotus, we must grasp the ideas attached to words, in order that we may be able to refer to them and so to judge the inferences of opinion or problems of investigation or reflection, so that we may not either leave everything uncertain and go on explaining to infinity or use words devoid of meaning.

2. [38] For this purpose it is essential that the first mental image associated with each word should be regarded, and that there should be no need of explanation, if we are really to have a standard to which to refer a problem of investigation or reflection or a mental inference. And besides we must keep all our investigations in accord with our sensations, and in particular with the immediate apprehensions whether of the mind or of any one of the instruments of judgment, and likewise in accord with the feelings existing in us, in order that we may have indications whereby we may judge both the problem of sense perception and the unseen.

## 16. The Use of Outlines

[Link to Letter to Herodotus](#)

1. For those who are unable, Herodotus, to work in detail through all that I have written about nature, or to peruse the larger books which I have composed, I have already prepared at sufficient length an epitome of the whole system, that they may keep adequately in mind at least the most general principles in each department, in order that as occasion arises they may be able to assist themselves on the most important points, in so far as they undertake the study of nature. But those also who have made considerable progress in the survey of the main principles ought to bear in mind the scheme of the whole system set forth in its essentials.
2. For we have frequent need of the general view, but not so often of the detailed exposition. Indeed it is necessary to go back on the main principles, and constantly to fix in one's memory enough to give one the most essential comprehension of the truth. And in fact the accurate knowledge of details will be fully discovered, if the general principles in the various departments are thoroughly grasped and borne in mind; for even in the case of one fully initiated the most essential feature in all accurate knowledge is the capacity to make a rapid use of observation and mental apprehension, and this can be done if everything is summed up in elementary principles and formulae. For it is not possible for anyone to abbreviate the complete course through the whole system, if he cannot embrace in his own mind by means of short formulae all that might be set out with accuracy in detail.

## 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.

## 18. Principal Doctrines Relevant to Canonics

[PD22](#). We must consider both the real purpose, and all the evidence of direct perception, to which we always refer the conclusions of opinion; otherwise, all will be full of doubt and confusion.

[PD23](#). If you fight against all sensations, you will have no standard by which to judge even those of them which you say are false.

[PD24](#). If you reject any single sensation, and fail to distinguish between the conclusion of opinion, as to the appearance awaiting confirmation, and that which is actually given by the sensation or feeling, or each intuitive apprehension of the mind, you will confound all other sensations, as well, with the same groundless opinion, so that you will reject every standard of judgment. And if among the mental images created by your opinion you affirm both that which awaits confirmation, and that which does not, you will not escape error,

since you will have preserved the whole cause of doubt in every judgment between what is right and what is wrong.

[PD25](#). If on each occasion, instead of referring your actions to the end of nature, you turn to some other, nearer, standard, when you are making a choice or an avoidance, your actions will not be consistent with your principles.

## 19. Vatican Sayings Relevant to Canonics

VS24. Dreams have no divine character nor any prophetic force, but they originate from the influx of images.

## 20. Diogenes Laertius Section on Canonics

[Link to Text](#) (Bailey - Warning - Note that he uses 'concept' instead of 'preconception')

1. [29] I will also give you the [Principal Doctrines](#), and a selection from his sayings which seem most worthy of mention. You will thus be able to understand Epicurus from every point of view and could form a judgment on him. The first letter he writes to Herodotus (and it deals with Physics; the second is to Pythocles), and it deals with Celestial Phenomena; the third is to Menoeceus, and contains the moral teaching. We must begin with the first letter, but I will first speak briefly about the divisions of his philosophy.
2. [30] It is divided into three parts, the Canonicon (or Procedure), the Physics and the Ethics. The Canonicon gives the method of approach to the system, and is contained in the work called *The Canon*. The Physics contains all the investigation into nature, and is contained in the thirty-seven books *On Nature* and in an abridged form in the letters. The Ethics deals with choice and avoidance, and is contained in the books *On Lives* and the letters and the book on *The End*. The Epicureans usually group the Canonicon with the Physics and state that it deals with the criterion of truth and the fundamental principles and contains the elements of the system. The Physics deals with creation and dissolution and with nature; the Ethics with things to be chosen or avoided, with the conduct of life and its purpose.
3. [31] Logic they reject as misleading. For they say it is sufficient for physicists to be guided by what things say of themselves. Thus in *The Canon* Epicurus says that the tests of truth are the sensations and concepts and the feelings; the Epicureans add to these the intuitive apprehensions of the mind. And this he says himself too in the summary addressed to Herodotus and in the [Principal Doctrines](#). For, he says, all sensation is irrational and does not admit of memory; for it is not set in motion by itself, nor when it is set in motion by something else, can it add to it or take from it. [32] Nor is there anything which can refute the sensations. For a similar sensation cannot refute a similar because it is equivalent in validity, nor a dissimilar a dissimilar, for the objects of which they are the criteria are not the same; nor again can reason, for all reason is dependent upon sensations; nor can one sensation refute another, for we attend to them all alike. Again, the fact of apperception confirms the truth of the sensations. And seeing and hearing are as much facts as feeling pain. From this it follows that as regards the imperceptible we must draw inferences from phenomena. For all thoughts have their origin in sensations by means of coincidence and analogy and similarity and combination, reasoning too contributing something. And the visions of the insane and those in dreams are true, for they cause movement, and that which does not exist cannot cause movement.
4. [33] The concept [preconception] they speak of as an apprehension or right opinion or thought or general idea stored within the mind, that is to say a recollection of what has often been presented from without, as for instance 'Such and such a thing is a man,' for the moment the word 'man' is spoken, immediately by means of the concept his form too is thought of, as the senses give us the information. Therefore the first signification of every name is immediate and clear evidence. And we could not look for the object of our search, unless we have first known it. For instance, we ask, 'Is that standing yonder a horse or a cow?' To do this we must know by means of a concept the shape of horse and of cow. Otherwise we could not have named them, unless we previously knew their appearance by means of a concept. So the concepts are clear and immediate evidence. Further, the decision of opinion depends on some previous clear and immediate evidence, to which we refer when we express

it: for instance, 'How do we know whether this is a man?'

5. [34] Opinion they also call supposition, and say that it may be true or false: if it is confirmed or not contradicted, it is true ; if it is not confirmed or is contradicted, it is false. For this reason was introduced the notion of the problem awaiting confirmation: for example, waiting to come near the tower and see how it looks to the near view. The internal sensations they say are two, pleasure and pain, which occur to every living creature, and the one is akin to nature and the other alien: by means of these two choice and avoidance are determined. Of investigations some concern actual things, others mere words. This is a brief summary of the division of their philosophy and their views on the criterion of truth.